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This is a man : language, memory, and identity in Primo Levi's Se questo e un uomo

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THIS IS A MAN: LANGUAGE, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY IN PRIMO LEVI'S SE QUESTO È UN UOMO

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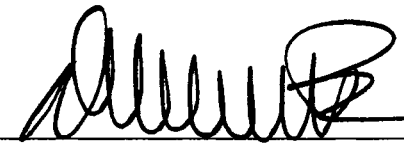

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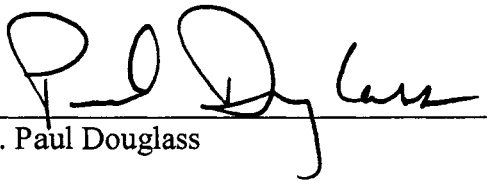

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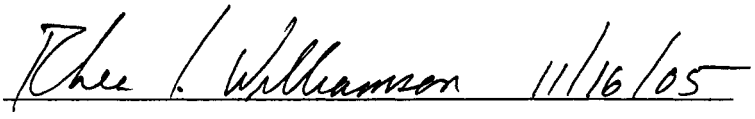

ABSTRACT

THIS IS A MAN: LANGUAGE, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY IN PRIMO LEVI'S SE QUESTO È UN UOMO

by Judith Ichisaka

This thesis analyzes language, memory, and identity in Primo Levi's Se questo è un uomo. Primo Levi, an Italian Jew, was imprisoned at Auschwitz for ten months in 1944 and 1945. In his memoir, Se questo è un uomo, Levi concentrates on the psychological and sociological dynamics of himself and others who were imprisoned with him in Auschwitz. The original title of Levi's work, Se questo è un uomo, illuminates the very question of his identity. By comparing the different types of personalities and situations Levi encounters in Se questo è un uomo, this thesis focuses on how language and memory play a major role in Levi's quest for survival, and, in the end, how they form his identity as a "saved man."

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It has been a great honor to work on this thesis with Dr. David Mesher, my director, professor, and mentor. His insights on ideas, careful analysis of my writing, and fountain of knowledge on Holocaust and Jewish Literature have been truly invaluable to me. Dr. Mesher's encouragement, guidance, patience and understanding, as well as his witty sense of humor have made this experience all the more enjoyable.

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My deepest gratitude and appreciation go to my family, who have supported me throughout all these years.

Dedicated
In Loving Memory
Sumiko Ichisaka, my mother

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Introduction

According to a Yiddish proverb, "Troubles overcome are good to tell." However, this has not always been the case for the accounts of Holocaust survivors. Henry Greenspan's book On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting and Life History reports that just after the Second World War, horrifying newsreels of the liberated camps evoked feelings of pity, fear, guilt, and revulsion among the viewers, and as a result, there was a general unwillingness to believe the testimonies (Greenspan 34). At the time, Holocaust survivors were identified solely as "the ones who were there," and not "living witnesses," and, consequently, they were avoided and isolated with their memories (Greenspan 34). Even though for a short time immediately after the war numerous of Holocaust testimonies were published, "many survivors recall being directly silenced, even when -- in spite of it all -- they did try to talk about it" (Greenspan 35).

But some survivors took months -- even decades -- to confront their experiences and to put their thoughts on paper. "To have survived the Holocaust means, at core, to live in two constantly compared but never integrated worlds" (Greenspan 9). Carole Angier theorizes that "the closer a trauma comes to you, the more likely, not less, you are to repress it," noting that Israel was the country that took the longest of all to read and write about the Holocaust (Angier 448). Charlotte Delbo wrote her first volume "Aucun de nous ne viendra" ("None of Us Will Return") in 1946, but put it away in a drawer and did not let it be published until 1965, when it "stood the test of time" (Langer, Auschwitz x). Elie Wiesel was silent for ten years before writing his first book in 1955, Un die welt hot geshvign (And the World Kept Silent).

Primo Levi, however, insisted on sharing as much as possible about his death camp experience through speaking and writing, eventually making it the mark of his entire existence. Just after the war ended, "Primo Levi the silent one, the listener, who never started a conversation in his life, before or after, was transformed" and his family and close friends speculated that "his experience had given him 'strange power of speech'" (Angier 421). From the mid-1950s onward, when interest in the Holocaust grew, Levi "spoke constantly in public about his Holocaust experiences and about his books" (Gordon 750). In the preface of his first memoir, Se questo è un uomo, Levi begins:

> It was my good fortune to be deported to Auschwitz only in 1944, that is, after the German Government had decided, owing to the growing scarcity of labour, to lengthen the average life-span of the prisoners destined for elimination; it conceded noticeable improvements in the camp routine and temporarily suspended killings at the whim of the individuals. (Survival 9)

In her essay, "Primo Levi: Levi and Memory," Gillian Banner explains that "when Levi wrote 'it was my good fortune,' his determination to be as truthful and as objective as possible means that the reader's own assumptions and hypotheses are tested. Whatever we think we know of or understand about Auschwitz is challenged by Levi" (Banner 92).

The initial motivation for Levi to write Se questo è un uomo was not to "leave an eyewitness account" but instead, Ferdinando Camon confirms, for "therapeutic purposes" (Camon 43). Primo Levi modestly reveals, in a conversation with Camon, that "while I was writing Survival in Auschwitz, I wasn't sure it would be published" (Camon 43).

Soon after he finished his first memoir in 1947, he had hoped that "the great Turinese house of Einaudi" would publish it (Angier 447). At that time, many diaries and memoirs poured into every publishing house, but they were only published by the smaller companies. Franco Antonicelli published the first edition of Se questo è un uomo on October 11, 1947, and Einaudi did not publish any Holocaust or Holocaust-related books until 1954 (Angier 448). Part of the reason for rejecting Levi's memoir was the careful consideration of sales and marketability; because "it was the wrong time -- a time of hope, not harsh reflection: a book like his was an indelicacy, a rude reminder, like talking of the chimney in Auschwitz" (Angier 448). And for a while this viewpoint was true -- Levi's book sold no more than 1,500 copies in the late 1940s (Thomson 51). However, in 1955, Einaudi offered to publish the second edition of Se questo è un uomo. This edition, which is the one read today, is "the foundation for Levi's extraordinary subsequent reputation" around the world (Gordon 750).

Levi's first memoir appeared in English in 1959. The title of Levi's memoir, originally (and more accurately) Se questo è un uomo, translated into English as If This Is a Man, illuminates the psychological and philosophical question that he constantly analyzes throughout each episode. Phillip Roth comments, "the description and analysis of [Levi's] atrocious memories of the Germans' 'gigantic biological and social experiment' is governed, precisely, by a quantitative concern for the ways in which a man can be transformed or broken down and, like a substance decomposing in a chemical reaction, lose his characteristics properties" (Roth, Survival 181). But regardless of the importance of the original title and its rich literary allusions and philosophical

connections, publishers in the United States changed the title Se questo è un uomo to Survival in Auschwitz. Because the title Survival in Auschwitz neither preserves Levi's original title nor adequately captures his objective for the reader, I will refer to the memoir in my thesis as Se questo è un uomo, except in citations.

Levi's Se questo è un uomo explores different psychological effects of the prisoners through his own camp experiences. In his essay, "The Genesis of If This Is a Man," Ian Thomson explains that Franco Antonicelli "took the definitive title from Levi's poem 'Psalm' ('Shema') in describing the destruction of man at Auschwitz, the poem had asked the reader to 'Consider if this is a man'" (Thomson 55). "The line carried an echo of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's astonished question to the Ancient Mariner, 'What manner of man art thou?' as well as an allusion to Elio Vittorini's famous novel of the Resistence, Uomini e no (Men and Non-Men)" (Thomson 55).

In the essay, "Behavior in Extreme Situations: Coercion," a work originally published in 1943 but which later added as a chapter in the 1960 publication of The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age, Bruno Bettelheim examines the psychological effects of prolonged exposure to extreme situations in places such as Auschwitz. Bettelheim breaks down the process of human adaptation into three phases, and examples of each are found Levi's memoir: traumatization, changes in behavior, and self-determination. Traumatization, the shock of imprisonment, is provoked by camp initiations and lasts through the prisoners' initial adjustment stage. The selection process and physical changes such as head shaving, tattooing, and showering happen so quickly that the prisoners do not have adequate time to fathom what is happening. Within a short

amount of time, all prisoners become unrecognizable by others in the camps. As Levi puts it in the beginning of his memoir, "imagine now a man who is deprived of everyone he loves, and at the same time of his house, his habits, his clothes, in short, of everything he possesses: he will be a hollow man, reduced to suffering and needs, forgetful of dignity and restraint" (Survival 27).

But what separates Levi's view from Bettelheim's understanding of adaptation is that in Se questo è un uomo, language and memory play a significant role in determining whether a person is a "man," *un uomo*, or not. Levi's testimony underscores the fact that obeying commands and performing physically demanding tasks every day are not enough to fulfill the definition of a "man," a human being. Levi shows that there two types of "men" in the camp:

> There comes to light the existence of two particularly well differentiated categories among men -- the saved and the drowned. Other pairs of opposites (the good and the bad, the wise and the foolish, the cowards and the courageous, the unlucky and the fortunate) are considerably less distinct, they seem less essential and above all they allow for more numerous and complex intermediary gradations. (Survival 87-8)

What divides Levi's two types, the drowned and the saved, are language, memory and identity.

The first chapter in my thesis focuses on the role of language in Levi's identity as a "man." Language is a vital tool in the camp because to know German is essential to understand the commands and instructions; and to know the language of the oppressors

helps Levi in passing a chemistry exam and receiving a job in the laboratory, which in turn, saves him from the severe winter conditions. Levi also explains that the prisoner is at an advantage if he learns the camp's hybrid jargon, a mixture of many different European languages, widely used in the Black Market. The camp jargon allows the prisoner to interact with others who do not speak the same native tongue and take more advantage of the resources around them.

However, Levi also acknowledges that everything in the Lager has different denotations from the "free" world:

> Just as our hunger is not that feeling of missing a meal, so our way of being cold has need of a new word. We say 'hunger', we say 'tiredness,' 'fear', 'pain', we say 'winter' and they are different things. They are free words, created and used by free men who live in comfort and suffering in their homes. (Survival 123)

According to Levi, there is not one word or short phrase to adequately express the depth of the words "cold," "tired," and "hungry" in the camps. He proclaims that

> If the Lagers had lasted longer a new, harsh language would have been born; and only this language could express what it means to toil the whole day in the wind, with the temperatures below freezing, wearing only a shirt, underpants, cloth jacket, and trousers, and in one's body nothing but weakness, hunger and knowledge of the ending drawing nearer. (Survival 123)

Levi is a master of languages; he has adequate knowledge of French and German, but he still has problems relaying what he is feeling or thinking to others. Two chapters in Se questo è un uomo focus on Levi's attempt to share his philosophical thoughts, "The Canto of Ulysses" and "Kraus." In "The Canto of Ulysses," Levi tries to relay to Jean the important message of humanity through Dante's poem. Later, when Levi speaks to Kraus, he knows that this new prisoner "will not survive very long here" but fails to make him understand that "nothing like everything is nothing here" (Survival 135). In these episodes from the second half of the memoir, Levi struggles to make himself understood when he attempts to relay complex ideas to others, because the longer he remains confined in Auschwitz, the more his communication skills deteriorate. However, Levi is able to show through his actions, whether teaching or working, that he retains cultural knowledge even while he is incarcerated in harsh conditions.

But, like other prisoners, Levi finds himself struggling with homesickness and isolation in the beginning of his imprisonment. In my second chapter, I will discuss how Levi learns, as the memoir progresses, that there must be a delicate balance between holding feelings of nostalgia and concentrating on the task at hand. Levi discovers early in his imprisonment that "one learns quickly enough to wipe out the past and future when one is forced to" (Survival 36). But one is not forced to all the time, and the ability to retain some knowledge of one's past and at the same time defy the camp's psychological manipulation underscores Levi's identity as an independent and intelligent human being.

During his imprisonment, Levi learns to adjust to his new surroundings and encounters a wide spectrum of prisoners who either reinforce or attempt to tear apart his

identity as a "man." My final chapter focuses on how Levi is able to confirm his identity as a man by discerning those who are "müsselmen" and those whom he finds trustworthy and sound. Levi learns through his interactions with others that "müsselmen" are "the weak, the inept, those doomed to selection" (Survival 88). In addition, by describing theft and deception in the camp, Levi challenges the reader to probe into certain aspects of the human mind and to question whether or not the prisoners' behavior under the most extreme conditions signal limitations in the definition of "man" (Survival 9). In her essay, "Reason as Revenge: Primo Levi and Writing the Holocaust," Ariella Lang concludes that Levi demonstrates the Lager's failure to destroy the integrity that identifies him as a moral human being, because he is able retain his academic skills and cultural memories in the camps, and after liberation, he is able to write the memoir in an even, non-vengeful tone (Lang 1).

Over sixty years after the liberation of Auschwitz, Se questo è un uomo is still regarded as one of the most powerful Holocaust testimonies ever written. When Hannah Arendt studied the Eichmann trials, she questioned if one can choose evil, and explored how ordinary men, who have no personal vendettas towards the victims, can carry out the order to kill subordinates. Levi's Se questo è un uomo shows, without asserting moral judgment, what prisoners are capable of becoming when they must attempt to survive harsh camp conditions. The memoir underpins Levi's definition of what it means to be "human," and his testimony still applies to us, because, as long as a form of civilization exists, human beings remain capable of extremely destructive and oppressive behavior.

Chapter One: Levi and Language

> Then for the first time we became aware that our language lacks words to express this offence, the demolition of a man (Survival 26).

In Se questo è un uomo, Levi discovers a new world order, a place where human life is clenched tightly within the fists of the SS guards, and the Germans' uncouth and wrathful speech penetrate through the ears of every prisoner. As Levi approaches the gates of Auschwitz, he notices a sign at entrance of the Nazi hell, "Arbeit Macht Frei, work gives freedom" (Survival 22). When Levi mentions this phrase in the beginning of the memoir, he does not go into detail about the meaning behind it. However, as Levi is forced to work and bunk with other inmates who do not speak or understand the same languages, he realizes that the key to survival is to master the camp jargon and social system. But even though Levi has a natural ability to learn new languages, he struggles to find the right words to express what he is experiencing, to others in the camp. Even though "the chapters have been written not in logical succession, but in order of urgency," the sequence of the episodes is chronological in that it shows a gradual disintegration of Levi's language ability, and, at the same time, his growing struggle to communicate with others in Auschwitz (Survival 9-10).

An analysis of what Levi learns of oral and non-verbal communication at the beginning of his Auschwitz experience is pivotal in understanding how the new camp vernacular influences Levi's communication ability throughout Se questo è un uomo. When Levi and other thirsty prisoners arrive at Auschwitz, the Germans put the new prisoners who "have had nothing to drink for four days" into "an enormous, empty room

that is poorly heated" (Survival 22). This particular scene is where Levi describes the keenness of the prisoners' basic senses: suffering from dehydration and hearing "the weak gurgle of the water in the radiators" which makes them "ferocious" as they taste the dryness of their mouths (Survival 22). At this point, one must ask, are the prisoners purposely put into an environment where body fluid loss would be lessened? As the prisoners are waiting, suspicious of the next moment, they see "a tap -- and above it a card" which states that "it is forbidden to drink as the water is dirty" (Survival 22). When Levi sees the message on the card, it becomes his first attempt to interpret an example of Auschwitzian language. Levi cynically comments that the message is "nonsense" (Survival 22). To Levi, "it seems obvious that the card is a joke, 'they' know that we are dying of thirst and they put us in a room, and there is a tap, and *Wassertrinken Verboten*" (Survival 22). It is apparent that the prisoners who see and hear the dripping faucet are forced to suffer in their dehydrated state. When Levi and the prisoners take a sip, they immediately discover that the water "is tepid and sweetish, with the smell of a swamp" (Survival 22). Levi's hasty comment that "the card is a joke" illuminates skepticism on the meaning of the message (22). Could there be a specific purpose in the message's warning, or is it an innocuous reminder for anyone -- prisoner or not -- who may want to drink from this tap? At this point, the reader asks if it is only coincidence that the thirsty prisoners are put into a room where there is only dirty water, or if the prisoners are purposely taken to this particular room as part of the camp's physical endurance test.

While the prisoners anxiously wait for the Germans to tell them what will occur next, Levi and the others quickly become "tired of being amazed" and have many

questions that no one bothers to answer (Survival 25). When the SS guard translates the comments on the whereabouts of their possessions, "one could see words coming bitterly out of Flesch's mouth; this was the German manner of laughing" (Survival 23). "The German manner of laughing" is Levi's introduction to the reader on nonverbal communication between the Germans and the prisoners (23). Levi notices that Flesch "is most unwilling to translate into Italian the hard cold German phrases and refuses to turn into German our questions because he knows that it is useless" (Survival 24). As they suffer from physically uncomfortable conditions, the bewildered and fearful prisoners cannot get reassurance from any form of communication with the Germans or long-time inmates. Even the Hungarian doctor, who came to Lager as a criminal four years before, "laughs, replies to some and not others, and it is clear that he avoids certain subjects" (Survival 25). However, when this criminal doctor talks about "other things, strange and crazy things," Levi has a difficult time accepting what he is hearing because "perhaps he too is playing with us" (Survival 25).

Shortly afterwards, Levi learns more nuances of the Lager vernacular as he asks for the simplest items. For example, he asks the boy in a striped suit if he will get his toothbrush returned. The French boy, "with his face animated by fierce contempt, threw at me 'Vous n'êtes pas à la maison.'" (Survival 29). It is this particular phrase that Levi and the other inmates hear many times afterwards: "you are not at home, this is not a sanatorium, the only exit is by way of the Chimney (What did it mean? Soon we were all to learn what it meant)" (Survival 29). Through his initial interactions with the prison

guards, he becomes well aware that every command is laced with contempt, and emphasizes the Nazi philosophy of the camp, as illustrated in the following scene:

> Driven by thirst, I eyed a fine icicle outside the window, within hand's reach. I opened the window and broke off the icicle but at once a large, heavy guard prowling outside brutally snatched it away from me. 'Warum?' I asked him in my poor German. 'Hier ist kein warum' (there is no why here), he replied, pushing me inside with a shove. (Survival 29)

Unless the prisoner has an adequate understanding of German spoken in Auschwitz, the prisoner becomes a victim of severe labor, repetitive beatings, and eventually death. As the prisoners receive their orientation in spurts, they "have learnt other things, more or less quickly, according to our intelligence: to reply 'Jawohl,' never to ask questions, always pretend to understand" (Survival 33).

Later, "after the first day of capricious transfer from hut to hut and Kommando to Kommando," Levi is assigned to Block 30 and shares a bunk with Diena (Survival 38). Even though it is late in the evening, Levi is "not sleepy," or, as he more accurately puts it, "my sleepiness is masked by a state of tension and anxiety of which I have not yet managed to get rid myself" (Survival 38). He copes with this problem by talking incessantly to Diena. When Levi hears "sleepy and angry voices shout at me: 'Ruhe, Ruhe!'" he understands that the other prisoners want him to be quiet, but says, "the word is new to me, and since I do not know its meaning and implications, my inquietude increases" (Survival 38). Levi explains that "the confusion of languages is a fundamental component of the manner of living here: one is surrounded by a perpetual Babel, in which

everyone shouts orders and threats in languages never heard before, and woe betide whoever fails to grasp the meaning" (Survival 38). Levi emphasizes that "no one has time here, no one has patience, no one listens to you; we latest arrivals instinctively collect in the corners, against the walls, afraid of being beaten" (Survival 38).

As Levi faces the unwelcoming inmates and hostile living conditions each day, Levi contemplates how, should he be lucky enough to survive his imprisonment, he will tell the world in intelligible words about what he has witnessed. Although Levi is bombarded with a cacophony of various spoken languages from the very first chapter, the main artery of Levi's struggle with language starts from a subconscious level, specifically in the two dreams that occur in the beginning of the memoir. Levi describes the two dreams in the beginning because they not only represent the emotional isolation he feels in the camp, but they both foreshadow his inability to communicate with the other prisoners as well. The first dream occurs early in the fourth chapter, "Ka-Be," when Levi and Null Achtzehn are waiting for the trains to pass. The name "Null Achtzehn" could be read as "zero life," since the characters for "18" are the same as the word for "life" in Hebrew. Levi's imagination is carried away with the wagons marked in Italian: "*Cavalli 8, Uomini 40, Tara, Portata*" (Survival 43). He imagines that, were he able to take the train to Italy, a woman would appear when he got off, asking "Who are you?" in Italian (Survival 43). In response, Levi would "tell her my story in Italian and she would understand, and she would give me food and shelter. And she would not believe the things I tell her, and I would show her the number on my arm, and then she would believe. ..." (Survival 42-3).

But this is wishful thinking. Immediately after this thought, the dream abruptly ends when "the last wagon has passed, and as if the curtain had been raised, the pile of cast-iron supports lies before our eyes" (Survival 44). This particular dream represents not only Levi's yearning for a time when he is able to return to his native Italy, but also a yearning to connect on an intimate level, the ideal type of relationship he wants to form with others but cannot do so in Auschwitz. Levi is stuck working with Null Achtzehn, who cannot understand what Levi is feeling because "when he speaks, when he looks around, he gives the impression of being empty inside" (Survival 42).

In the chapter immediately after "Ka-Be," Levi has the second dream, which amplifies his desire to connect with others. In his chapter on "The Context of Recounting," Henry Greenspan explains, "Recounting means finding words and voice where words and voice fail" and "whatever the specific motives in retelling -- to remember the dead, to warn the living, to indict the killers, to document the crime -- every act of recounting, really by definition, is premised on the possibility of responsive listeners" (Greenspan 36). In the second dream, Levi imagines he is at home in Turin, with his sister, along with "some unidentifiable friend and many other people" who are listening to his stories of Auschwitz. He imagines that he is telling them about

> the whistle of the three notes, the hard bed, my neighbour, whom I would like to move, but whom I am afraid to wake as he is stronger than me. I also speak diffusely of our hunger and of the lice control, and of the Kapo who hit me on the nose and then sent me to wash myself as I was bleeding. (Survival 60)

Levi feels "an intense pleasure, physical, inexpressible, to be at home, among friendly people" as he recounts his experiences to them (Survival 60). However, Levi's hopes of invoking any emotional response in his audience immediately plummet when he notices that they are "completely indifferent" (Survival 60). Unlike in the first dream, where the unknown woman pays complete attention to Levi's story and begins to believe him after seeing the tattoo, the second dream turns into a nightmare. The audience is "completely indifferent" and "they speak confusedly of other things among themselves," which leaves Levi isolated (Survival 60). His sister looks at him once and "gets up and goes away without a word," as if he had said something completely absurd (Survival 60). Greenspan explains that the risk Levi faces when he re-enters "the darkness," is leading the listeners to "misunderstandings, resistance, and, sometimes, outright rejection" (Greenspan 36).

Levi is determined to tell "the rest" what he has witnessed in Auschwitz even before he is liberated, but he is worried that the outside world will ignore what he has to say (Survival 9). The thought of not being able to gain empathy from close friends and family members is more distressful than that of not being able to communicate with an unknown person. As Levi lies perfectly still on his camp bed in the quiet night, his mind spins with "desolating grief" and he feels a "pain [...] which makes children cry" (Survival 60). It is the type of pain that leaves him helpless and deprived of the reassurance and security of a sympathetic listener. As Levi lies on the uncomfortable bunk, "the nights drag on" in Auschwitz as

> the suffering of the day, composed of hunger, blows, cold, exhaustion, fear and promiscuity, turns at night-time into shapeless nightmares of unheard-of violence, which in free life would only occur during a fever. One wakes up at every moment, frozen with terror, shaking in every limb, under the impression of an order shouted out by a voice full of anger in a language not understood. (Survival 62)

When Levi forces himself to wake up, he is "full of anguish" and realizes that he has had this particular nightmare "not once but many times since I arrived" (Survival 60). Unable to fall back asleep, Levi remembers, "I have recounted it to Alberto and he confided to me, in my amazement that it is also his dream and the dream of many others, perhaps of everyone" (Survival 60). Levi asks in vain, "Why does this happen? Why is the pain of every day translated so constantly into our dreams, in the every-repeated scene of the unlistened-to story?" (Survival 60)

Throughout Se questo è un uomo, Levi affirms that, according to Lawrence Schehr, "Survival comes through a mastery of language; this is one of the lessons of Auschwitz and of the long journey toward repatriation" (Schehr 435). "Language" does not solely refer to German, but also to the hybrid, rudimentary form of verbal communication created by the prisoners in the camps. In chapter three, Levi hints that there is a difficulty in expressing basic needs, by listing different translations for "bread," the only source of substantial food: "within five minutes begins the distribution of bread, of bread-Brot-Broid-chleb-pain-lechem-keynér" (Survival 39). This "holy grey slab which seems gigantic in your neighbour's hand" is scarce, and the ration is described as

"so small as to make you cry" (Survival 39). Once the prisoners receive a piece, it hardly satiates their hunger. The repetition of "bread" in different languages signifies the prisoners' great demand for sustenance and tremendous anguish for not being able to get enough of it. The list of words are significant because they emphasize the prisoners' desperation, and that no calling for bread in any language will satiate the desire to receive enough to overcome their hunger.

In chapter seven, Levi describes Buna as a place "as large as a city" with "forty thousand foreign workers" and where "fifteen to twenty languages are spoken" (Survival 72). The Lager, or "camp", is a place where

> all the foreigners live in different Lagers which surround the Buna: the Lager of the English prisoners-of-war, the Lager of the Ukrainian women, the Lager of the French volunteers and others we do not know. Our Lager (*Judenlager, Vernichtungslager, Kazett*) by itself provides ten thousand workers who come from all the nations of Europe. (Survival 72)

The factory name "Buna," which stands for starting materials Butadiene and Natrium (the sodium used in production) was associated with the IG-Farben industrial complex where synthetic rubber was produced. Levi proclaims that "the Buna factory, on which the Germans were busy for four years and for which countless of us suffered and died, never produced a pound of synthetic rubber" (Survival 73). Levi believes that all prisoners in Auschwitz are "the slaves of the slaves, whom all can give orders to, and our name is the number which we carry tattooed on our arm and sewn on our jacket" (Survival 72). Immediately after this statement, Levi describes the Carbide Tower, a significant symbol

in analyzing the role of language in his memoir. Levi explains that "the Carbide Tower, which rises in the middle of Buna and whose top is rarely visible in the fog [...] was built by us" (Survival 72). Levi lists various words for "brick," the single material used to build the Carbide Tower: "*Ziegel, briques, tegula, cegli, kamenny, mattoni, téglak*" (Survival 73). In this case, no number of bricks or amount of labor will be enough to satisfy the Nazis in the camp; the tower's bricks "were cemented by hate: hate and discord, like the Tower of Babel, and it is this that we call it: -- Babelturm, Bobelturm; and in it we hate the insane dream of grandeur of our masters, their contempt for God and men, for us men" (Survival 72-3).

A comparison of the Tower of Babel and the Carbide Tower can be made in that the builders of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 are cursed with an inability to understand each other, and Levi and his fellow inmates are, at first, cursed with the inability to communicate their thoughts with others. Genesis 11 begins with, "the whole earth was of one language and of one speech" and ends concludes with "therefore was the name of it called Babel; because God did there confound the language of all the earth; and from thence did God scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth" (Gen 11:1-9). The biblical passage associates Babel with the Hebrew word for confusion, and may have influenced the development of the English word "babble." The archaic definition of "confusion" is defined as "to bring to ruin," and like the downfall of "one speech" in Genesis, the Germans attempt to ruin the prisoners by taking away their languages. In their essay, "On Language and Personhood: A Linguistic Odyssey," Patricia Sayre and Linnea Vacca point out that in the camp, the Germans "deprive prisoners of their own

capacity to generate meaningful language by throwing together speakers of dozens of mutually unintelligible languages in circumstances so brutal and degrading that efforts to build linguistic bridges are kept to a minimum" (Sayre 117).

According to Nicholas Patruno, in both Se questo è un uomo and a later memoir, I sommersi e i salvati (The Drowned and the Saved), "Levi recalls how many prisoners, especially among his fellow Italians, were put to death simply because, unable to understand German, they could not follow orders" (Patruno 92). Patruno's understanding of Levi's experience with language is that "if the word, the *logos*, is what distinguishes rational beings from animals, then, to reduce humans to the state of an animal, it was necessary for the Nazis to strip them of their verbal power to communicate" (Patruno 92). Levi explains later that "we are untouchables to civilians" and the Germans "hear us speak in many different languages, which they do not understand and which sound to them as grotesque as animal noises" (Survival 121). Thus, "instead of a new language," Cliff concludes, "the conditions of the Lager resulted in the violent abuse and manipulation of the existing language" (Cliff 108). The conditions at Auschwitz had a large impact on language because

> under conditions of extreme physical and moral deprivation, brutality readily becomes the norm. And here the suppression of language has yet another role to play: it is easier to the unspeakable to other persons if they cannot speak, for it is easier to view them as objects indifferent to pain. (Sayre 117)

Yet, even though brutality and language manipulation may have become the norm at Auschwitz, a subtle pattern connecting the chapters of Levi's memoir suggests that the prisoners still manage to create a rudimentary form of human culture. "Language sustains virtually all the social structures that form the matrix of human experience; it is vital to our capacity to construct a sense of self, and gives purpose and significance to our lives" (Sayre 116). Amid the subhuman condition, the builders of the Carbide Tower, a polyglot group of people who are imprisoned together, are able to create a communicable language. "To communicate, to relate by way of the intelligible word, was the weapon with which to counteract and obstruct the Nazis' intention of completely annihilating the Jewish population" (Patruno 93).

This new camp language is most useful in the black market, as detailed in the chapter "This Side of Good and Evil," where the Greeks, "who have been reduced to very few," have greatly influenced Buna commerce customs by contributing to "the international slang in circulation" (Survival 79). As verbal communication is the common method of social interaction among the Häftlinge in the Market, "these few survivors from the Jewish colony of Salonica, with their two languages, Spanish and Greek [...] are the repositories of a concrete, mundane, conscious wisdom, in which the traditions of all the Mediterranean civilizations blended together" (Survival 79). In the Market, "everyone knows that 'caravana' is the bowl, and that 'la comedera es buena' means that the soup is good; the word that expresses the generic idea of theft is 'klepsiklepsi,' of obvious Greek origin" (Survival 79).

In the camp, the prisoners are prohibited from keeping handwritten notes, and many have not practiced their penmanship since their arrest. However, the prisoners are allowed to keep their bowls each day, and whatever the prisoners have inscribed at the bottoms of their bowls is something they do not want to forget. When Levi, Alberto, Clausner, and the Dutchman are led to the magnesium chloride warehouse to take the chemistry exam, they know that it will be in German. Levi and the others wonder why the Germans are in need of chemists, especially from a group "of us who are no longer alive, of us who have already gone half-crazy in the dreary expectation of nothing" (Survival 103). "Clausner shows me the bottom of his bowl" where it is written, "Ne pas chercher à comprendre" ("Don't seek to comprehend") (Survival 103). While Levi and Alberto have their names written in their bowls, Clausner carries around a statement that reflects a vital lesson of the camp. Levi wonders how they are expected to pass the exam when "we will have to go in front of some blond Aryan doctor hoping that we do not have to blow our noses, because perhaps he will not know that we do not have handkerchiefs, and it will certainly not be possible to explain it to him" (Survival 103). When everyone notices that "Balla has a pencil" the prisoners crowd around him because they "are not sure if [they] still know how to write, [they] want to try" (Survival 104). Levi writes down the "the German names of compounds and laws" for hydrocarbons and mass action law, respectively: "*Kohlenwasserstoffe, Massenwirkungsgestez*" (Survival 104).

As Alex begins his interrogation during Levi's chemistry exam, Alex asks, "Wo sind Sie geboren?" ("Where were you born?") (Survival 106). When Alex addresses

Levi as "Sie, the polite form of address," Levi believes that "Doktor Ingenieur Pannwitz has no sense of humour" (Survival 106). Levi then blurts out to the reader, "curse him, he is not making the slightest effort to speak a slightly more comprehensible German" (Survival 106). Levi's sudden anger suggests that he is frustrated with his inability to communicate effectively with his limited knowledge of German. Levi eventually makes it through the examination, but he "knows the Lager well enough to realize that one should never anticipate, especially optimistically" (Survival 107).

Even though Levi is able to retain his basic writing skills and pass the German chemistry exam, once Levi creates the allegory of the Carbide Tower, his ability to converse with others in any intelligible language begins to deteriorate on a *personal* level. Levi realizes that the longer he remains in Auschwitz, the more he struggles to find the right words to express what he wants to say, especially when he tries to create a connection with another human being. As the Carbide Tower hovers over him, Levi stops making lists of words for the same thing in multiple languages; instead, Levi focuses on his struggle to come up with words that not only accurately describe the cause and effect of chemical reactions, but of human behavior and philosophical lessons as well. This is especially reflected in the chapters "The Canto of Ulysses" and "Kraus," where Levi interacts closely with another person who does not share a common language with him.

In "The Canto of Ulysses," the willingness of Jean (Pikolo) to learn Italian triggers Levi's ability to communicate in two human languages -- Italian and French -- languages of cultures that are rich in literature and the arts. Levi tells the reader, "I

would be pleased to teach him Italian: why not try? We can do it" (Survival 111). When Limentani speaks to Levi, Pikolo listens intently to their conversation, repeating the words, "*zup-pa, cam-po, acqua*" (Survival 112). Levi begins to give Pikolo as much information about his culture as possible, and with ambitiousness, he points out that "the important thing is to not lose time, not to waste this hour" (Survival 112). Then suddenly, the "Canto of Ulysses" from Dante's *Inferno* pops into Levi's mind for a reason he does not know, but "we have no time to change, this hour is already less than an hour" (Survival 112).

Levi's mind grasps for the exact words in Dante's poem to translate in French. Levi is able to recall the first several lines of the poem, but then he gets stuck. Levi notices the limitations of his French: "Here I stop and try to translate. Disatrous -- poor Dante and poor French!" (Survival 112). Levi continues by offering bits and pieces of more lines, but he cannot recall over half of the entire poem.

As Levi and Pikolo approach the soup queue, Levi states that he is "in a hurry, a terrible hurry" and feels tremendous pressure to teach Pikolo as much as possible. "Here, listen, Pikolo, open your ears and your mind, you have to understand, for my sake," Levi demands (Survival 113). Because there is not much time before they separate, Levi anxiously wants Pikolo to "understand, for my sake" the lines:

> Think of your breed; for brutish ignorance
>
> Your mettle was not made; you were made men,
>
> To follow after knowledge and excellence. (Survival 113)

When Levi recites these lines, he forgets who and where he is. According to Zvi Jagendorf, the lines are "heard by him, as if he were being addressed, apocalyptically, by a divine voice or the astounding trumpet, or as if he himself were one of that original Homeric band of sea-hardened adventurers" (38). It is at this particular verse where the scene of writing and the scene of teaching coincide. Jagendorf believes that "The scene of writing shows Primo Levi back in Italy, after the war, not the lines of Dante but the anguish of forgetting them" (38). The scene of teaching, of course, is the lesson from Dante's *Inferno* and how it applies to their present state. "Pikolo begs me to repeat it. How good Pikolo is, he is aware that this is doing me good" (Survival 113-4). Levi is satisfied and glad that Pikolo might have "received the message, he has felt that it has to do with him, that it has to do with all men who toil, and us in particular" (Survival 114). And yet, soon after this achievement, Levi stumbles upon another language block when he tries to remember the verse, "My little speech made every one so keen. ..." (Survival 114). Levi struggles with his limited language ability because he tries, "but in vain, to explain how many things this 'keen' means. There is another lacuna here, this time irreparable" (Survival 114). Levi cannot translate "keen" because it represents an emotion, triggered by a "speech," verbal communication that is supposed to relay those emotions accurately and articulately. Jagendorf indicates that at this point "the jargon of the camp invades the Dantean text" (Jagendorf 40). Towards the end of Levi's lesson, "as the lines become fragmented and words and rhymes are sought out of context, the German words *keine Ahnung* (no idea), enters Primo's mind" (Jagendorf 40).

The infiltration of Lager words blocks Levi from remembering the rest of the poem. Levi apologizes: "Forgive me, Pikolo, I have forgotten at least four triplets" (Survival 114). Levi offers four more lines, in a mixture of French and Italian, and then stops abruptly again. He cannot connect the phrase "the like on any day" to the last lines and by this time is so desperate for words that he "would give today's soup" to find out how. "I try to reconstruct it through the rhymes, I close my eyes, I bite my fingers -- but it is no use, the rest is silence" (Survival 114). Here, Levi's rich knowledge of literature and multilingual ability is again reduced to silence. He fights the silence by trying to recall other verses, the last stanza ending with "Rose, and the prow went down, as pleased Another" (Survival 114). Making Pikolo walk slower, Levi emphasizes how "vitally necessary and urgent" that his student "understands this 'as pleased Another' before it is too late" because

> tomorrow he or I might be dead, or we might never see each other again, I must tell him, I must explain to him about the Middle ages, about the so human and so necessary and yet unexpected anachronism, but still more, something gigantic that I myself have only just seen, in a flash of intuition, perhaps the reason for our fate, for our being here today ... (Survival 115)

But the harsh words "Kraut und Rüben," then "Choux et navets. Kaposzta és répak," rapidly destroy Levi's chance of telling Pikolo his epiphany on why Dante's poem came to his mind, and the soup, with "its closeness and its offer of animal satisfaction, blocks the way to the enlightenment that completing the Dantean passage might achieve"

(Jagendorf 40). Unfortunately, from this point on, Levi is no longer able to relay his philosophical message to others.

The reader notices that Levi does not mention anything about dreams between chapter five and chapter fourteen. One of the reasons for this delay is because Levi spends most of the chapters concentrating on the logistics of the camp and how he learns to adjust by controlling his feelings of nostalgia and completing the work in front of him. In the chapter "Kraus," Levi shows how much camp wisdom he has gained, but also how much his ability to communicate has deteriorated. By this time in the memoir, Levi and the surviving Italian prisoners are considered "old Häftlinge," because "our wisdom lay in 'not trying to understand', not imagining the future, not tormenting ourselves as to how and when it will be all over, not asking others or ourselves questions" (Survival 116). In the chapter, Levi must work with a new prisoner who "understands German badly and does not know a word of French" (Survival 132). Levi mentions that in the camp, "one in two prisoners was Hungarian, and Hungarian had become the second language in the camp after Yiddish" (Survival 116). The lack of a common language disrupts the rhythm of the work with Kraus, and creates a potentially dangerous situation. "Kraus misses his stroke, a lump of mud flies up and splatters over my knees. It is not the first time it has happened, I warn him to be careful, but without much hope" (Survival 132). For Kraus, "to keep step and carry on a complicated conversation in German is too much" and by watching Kraus work, Levi knows that Kraus believes that in Auschwitz, as in the outside world, "the more one works the more one earns and eats," so it is apparent that "he has not yet understood where we are" (Survival 132-4).

To show the reader the extent of Kraus's incompetence, Levi points out that "an important thing happened, and it is worth telling now, perhaps for the same reason that it happened then" (Survival 134). Levi attempts to communicate to Kraus in broken German, "slowly separating the words, making sure after each sentence that he had understood" (Survival 134). Levi is well aware that new prisoners will often dream of home and abundant food, as he once did, so he deceives Kraus by telling him about a dream he never had: "I told him that I had dreamt that I was at home, the home where I was born, with my family, sitting with my legs under the table, and on the table a great deal, a very great deal to eat" (Survival 134). Like the two dreams Levi has previously, the setting is comprised of what Levi wishes for the most: the security of his home in Italy, an abundance of food, and mutual friendship. The dream jumps to a scene in which "it was summer and it was in Italy" and "then all of a sudden the bell rang, and I got up hurriedly and went to open the door, and who did I see? I saw him, this very Kraus Páli, with hair grown, clean and well nourished and dressed as a free man, with a loaf of bread in his hand. Yes, a loaf of four pounds, still warm" (Survival 134). He continues: "I felt filled with joy and made him come in, and I explained to my parents who he was, and that he had come from Budapest [...] and I gave him food and drink and a good bed to sleep in, and it was nighttime, but there was a wonderful warmth so that we were all dry in a moment. ..." (Survival 134).

Kraus responds only in Hungarian, and Levi does not understand a word of it: "I am sorry I do not know Hungarian, for his emotion has broken the dykes, and he is breaking out in a flood of outlandish Magyar words" (Survival 134). The inability of

Kraus to convey his feelings completely to Levi combined with the sorrow that Levi feels in not being able to understand Kraus intensifies the emotions and frustrations between them. Levi can only describe the emotions exchanged to the reader and laments, "I cannot understand anything except my name," and guesses that "by the solemn gestures one would say that he is making promises and prophecies" (Survival 134). Levi does not speak Yiddish or Hungarian, and, at this point, it is clear that the situation has far exceeded the limits of Levi's ability to communicate well even by non-verbal gestures. The emotionally clamorous "silence" frustrates Levi, partly because he is unable to find the right words to make Kraus understand a vital lesson of the camps, and also because he believes Kraus is incompetent.

The longer Levi is exposed to the camp language, the greater his struggle to find appropriate, intelligible words to express his experiences. Levi explains to the reader that "Just as our hunger is not that feeling of missing a meal, so our way of being cold has need of a new word. Levi comments that "We say 'hunger', we say 'tiredness', 'fear', 'pain', we say 'winter' and they are different things" (Survival 123). Levi makes the distinction that these are "free words, created and used by free men who lived in comfort and suffering in their homes" (Survival 123). "Levi rails at the inadequacy of language to express such simple concepts as 'hunger,' 'tiredness,' 'fear,' 'pain,' and 'winter'"(Sodi, Rhetoric 42). Risa Sodi believes that "The brutality of the camps is underlined in Levi's prose by liberal use of juxtapositions contrasting expressions of human compassion and the harsh language of the camps" (Rhetoric 43).

Levi's experiences with the camp language affirm Sodi's comment that "the dominant Holocaust lexemes of Yiddish, Hungarian, Czech, Polish, and Slovak surrounded the Italian inmates: the German of Goethe and Gatterman, so dear to Levi in his youth, had been replaced by the Lagerdeutsch of the camps" (Sodi, Rhetoric 42). Brian Cliff agrees that "this Lager German was not the German of Mann or Rilke, but was rather 'skeletal, howled, studded with obscenities and imprecations...only vaguely related to the austere language of my chemistry textbooks" (Cliff 107). In Levi's Lager

> the camp bell rings for a long time, and the night-guard in every hut goes off duty; he switches on the light, gets up, and stretches himself and pronounces the daily condemnation: 'Aufstehen,' or more often in Polish: 'Wstavac.' Very few sleep on till the Wstavac: it is a moment of too acute pain for even the deepest sleep not to dissolve as it approaches" (Survival 63).

Levi describes the impact of the Nazi commands on the prisoners: "Like a stone the foreign word falls to the bottom of every soul. 'Get up': the illusory barrier of the warm blankets, the thin armour of sleep, the nightly evasion with its very torments drops to pieces around us, and we find ourselves mercilessly awake, exposed to insult, atrociously naked and vulnerable" (Survival 63).

Levi believes that "if the Lagers had lasted longer a new, harsh language would have been born; and only this language could express what it means to toil the whole day in the wind, with the temperature below freezing, wearing only a shirt, underpants, cloth jacket and trousers, and in one's body nothing but weakness, hunger, and knowledge of

the end drawing nearer" (Survival 123). In Sayre and Vacca's point of view, "Under conditions of extreme physical and moral deprivation, brutality readily becomes the norm. And here the suppression of language has yet another role to play: it is easier to the unspeakable to other persons if they cannot speak, for it is easier to view them as objects indifferent to pain" (117). From the beginning of his memoir, Levi believes "the Lager was a great machine to reduce us to beasts, we must not become beasts; that even in this place one can survive, and therefore one must want to survive, to tell the story, to bear witness" (Survival 41). Once the Germans abandoned the camp, the first soup was "distributed with enthusiasm and devoured with greed, the great silence of the plain was broken" (Survival 164). However, according to Sayre and Vacca, "it is one thing to desire to speak, however, and another actually to find the words to communicate that which appears to be beyond the expressive powers of language" (Sayre 126).

For any Holocaust survivor, writing a memoir not only depends heavily on reliability and confidence in the accuracy of memory. It is also crucial that he is able to express his reflections in a coherent manner. Like Levi, many other Holocaust survivors have mentioned that they have encountered the same frustration of not being able to make their post-war audience aware of their camp experiences and past sufferings. Charlotte Delbo began one volume of her work with the words "Explain the inexplicable," which infers that "the challenge to future readers would be how to remember those years whose 'unthinkable' incidents no one really wished to reawaken from the slumber of forgetfulness" (Langer, Auschwitz xi). Patterson summarizes the problem of expression best: "The failed words of memory that cover the pages of the Holocaust memoir are

inscribed with the blood of this broken word. And a broken word cannot but fail in its effort to make heard the shriek and the silence that haunt its author. The memory of silence is all that is left of those who were silenced. And this memory is the hope for a recovery from the illness of silence" (136-7).

Chapter Two: Levi and Memory

> Human memory is a marvelous but fallacious instrument.
> (Levi, Drowned 23)

In the very first chapter of Se questo è un uomo, the night before the journey to Auschwitz, everyone sits "on the bare soil in a circle for the lamentations, praying and weeping all the night" and feels "the ancient grief of the people that has no land, the grief without hope of the exodus which is renewed every century" (Survival 16). When they wake up on the first morning in captivity, they discover a painful realization that "the time for meditation, the time for decision was over, and all the reason dissolved into a tumult, across which flashed the happy memories of our homes, still so near in time and space, as painful as the thrusts of the sword" (Survival 16). Their chances of escaping from arrest have expired, and there is no time to stop and think of a plan to avoid what is happening to them. Because Levi and the other inmates are ripped away from their home countries and families without any mental or emotional preparation, denying or forgetting one's past becomes extremely difficult. The prisoners know at this point that they are doomed to death, and before they board the train, "many things were then said and done among us; but of these it is better that there remained no memory" (Survival 16).

Only after he is liberated does Levi know that the ones who can forget or at least suppress their past and quickly adjust to the harsh conditions have a higher chance of surviving in Auschwitz. In the chapter "On the Bottom," Levi describes in detail the rigorous schedules and rules of Auschwitz which are imperative for every prisoner to learn. Every day, Levi and the other prisoners must "make the 'bed' perfectly flat and

smooth; smear one's muddy and repellent wooden shoes with the appropriate machine grease; scrape the mudstains off one's clothes" (Survival 34). Then "on Saturday have one's beard and hair shaved" and "on Sunday, undergo the general control for skin diseases" (Survival 34). The work they perform is described by Levi as "a Gordian knot of laws, taboos and problems" and he lists the hours of operation, pointing out that "under no excuse are the Häftlinge allowed to be at work during the hours of darkness or when there is a thick fog, but they work regularly even if it rains or snows" (Survival 36). In addition to adhering to all of these strict time constraints and regulations, the inmates must train themselves to "wipe out the past and the future" and learn quickly that "it was better not to think" if they want to survive (Survival 37).

But Levi cannot forget his past. In the chapter "Ka-Be," Levi shares with the reader his first episode of nostalgia for Italy and his feelings of homesickness. Levi is forced to work in a place where the other inmates are forced to go through a mundane routine: "to the store, bending underneath the load, back again" (Survival 42). Like zombies, the prisoners perform their rote task, "not speaking" (Survival 42). For this job, Levi is paired with Null Achtzehn, who is considered "no longer a man" by others, and is generally described by Levi as a man who "gives the impression of being empty inside" with "sad, opaque eyes" (Survival 42-43). As I have explained in my first chapter, the name "Null Achtzehn" could be read as "zero life," since the characters for "18" are the same as the word for "life" in Hebrew. Null Achtzehn is not the type of prisoner who is emotionally affected by anything. Compared to Null Achtzehn, Levi is "weak and

clumsy," but Levi's feelings are far more receptive to the memories of the past which trigger his homesickness.

For example, while their hands are free from carrying heavy loads, a long train crosses their walking path. Levi and Null Achtzehn wait patiently for the locomotive to pass. Levi notices the Italian wagon, as the train blocks their view of the camp. For a few minutes, Levi forgets Null Achtzehn's presence and immediately imagines climbing into the train, hiding there "quiet and still in the dark" (Survival 43). Levi dreams that once he sits in the train, he would enter a state of hypnosis to pass the time; he would "listen endlessly to the rhythm of the wheels" (Survival 43). Levi believes this rhythm would be "stronger than hunger or tiredness" until he reaches his native country (Survival 43). Levi's mind is carried further to an imaginary place filled with physical comfort and fecundity, where he "would feel the warm air and the smell of hay and [he] would get out into the sun; then [he] would lie down on the ground to kiss the earth [...] with [his] face in the grass" (Survival 43).

The embracing "warm air," the "smell of hay," and the bright sun starkly contrast with the cold, sterile, hostile environment surrounding Levi and Null Achtzehn. Gillian Banner comments that Levi's "moment of revelation fades [...] as the 'last wagon passed' and the dream which is sparked by the sight of the Italian names evaporates" (Banner 98). The mirage of an Italian paradise suddenly disappears, leaving only "the pile of cast iron supports" lying before the prisoner's eyes (Survival 44). Levi notices "the Kapo on his feet at the pile" and laments, "Alas for the dreamer: the moment of consciousness that accompanies the awakening is the acutest of sufferings" (Survival 44).

However, Levi asserts that this feeling "does not often happen to us, and they are not long dreams. We are only tired beasts" (Survival 44). Although the reader does not know how often Levi had these types of dreams during his imprisonment, the statement "we are only tired beasts" implies that Levi's excuse for thinking about home, or at the very least, escaping from the camp, is fatigue. But could he also mean that fatigue is the reason why he lets his guard down, and does something he knows is counterproductive to survival in the camps? Even though Levi has mentioned that, while they work, they do not have time to think of other things, it is obvious in this example that external objects, such as the train, can instantly trigger homesickness.

According to Sedikides, Wildschut and Baden's study, symptoms of homesickness, which can include changes in sleeping patterns, loneliness, and irritability, are universal. But for death camp inmates, homesickness is much more amplified with anguish and helplessness. In the four short paragraphs describing the scene with the train, Levi's tone changes from desperation to anger when they find themselves "again at the foot of the pile" (Survival 44). Levi realizes that Null Achtzehn has no idea what just went through his mind, and it would be useless to try to talk about the dream because Null Achtzehn is one who "carries out all the orders that he is given, and it is foreseeable that when they send him to his death he will go with the same total indifference" (Survival 43). Levi believes that because Null Achtzehn is a müsselman, he will not understand the amount of pain, tiredness and yearning Levi feels. Isolated and physically weak, Levi reaches the foot of the pile again and he notices that Mischa and the Galician's jobs are "less tiring" because they can "show excess zeal to keep it: they shout

at the companions who dawdle" (Survival 44). Forced to pick up another heavy load, Levi is immediately filled "with anger" because he cannot stop and continue to think about his home (Survival 44). Adjusting to and accepting the "social structure of the camp" is very difficult for Levi at this point, even though he knows that "it is in the normal order of things that the privileged oppress the unprivileged" (Survival 44).

Soon it is Levi's turn to walk in front of Null Achtzehn, as they pace themselves while carrying the load back towards the store. At the "door of the store," Levi "cannot go any further" and "cannot stand the pain and exhaustion any longer" (Survival 44). Immediately Null Achtzehn trips, and a piece of iron gashes the back of Levi's foot. (Survival 44). His shoe full of blood, Levi is sent to the Ka-Be that night, where "the material discomforts are relatively few" (Survival 50). The Ka-Be, or Krankenbau (infirmary), is considered "the Lager without its physical discomforts" and is a perfect place where one can contemplate the past (Survival 55). Philosophy flourishes in the Ka-Be, because "whoever still has some seeds of conscience, feels his conscience re-awaken: and in the long empty days, one speaks of other things than hunger and work and one begins to consider what they have made us become, how much they have taken away from us, what this life is" (Survival 55).

In the Ka-Be, Levi's interactions with other inmates show that "we know where we come from," and that every prisoner realizes that "the memories of the world outside crowd our sleeping and our waking hours, we become aware, with amazement, that we have forgotten nothing, every memory evoked rises in front of us painfully clear" (Survival 55). Sedikides, Wildschut and Baden do not believe that nostalgia "always, or

even typically, induces sadness" but that it "is often triggered by intrapersonal, social, or environmental stimuli and that it may sometimes involve minimal or implicit comparison of the past with the present" (4). At night in the Ka-Be, when the inmates get together and talk, the wooden hut is "full of words, memories, and of another pain" (Survival 55). Levi explains that the German word for this pain is "*Heimweh*," defined as "longing for one's home" (Survival 55).

In his essay "The Haunted Journey of Primo Levi," Gian Biasin explains that "exile and nostalgia are indeed what their etymological roots tell: the pain and the longing to return (Greek *nostos* + *algia*) felt by one who has been forced out of his soil, his native country (Latin *ex* + *solum*)" (Biasin 14). Biasin's essay, which only analyzes Levi's second memoir, La tregua, points out that the concept of nostalgia is present when "comparisons with domestic habits or landscapes spring up spontaneously in front of strange occurrences or different lands" (Biasin 15). In Se questo è un uomo, Levi juxtaposes physical exhaustion with idleness to make the point that "when one works, one suffers and there is no time to think: our homes are less than a memory" (Survival 55). And yet in the idle nights at the Ka-Be, the prisoners are able to reflect on their past. Sedikides, Wildschut and Baden's theory is that the "induction of nostalgia brings about mild discontent and sadness, due to the contrast between a desirable past and an undesirable present" (4). As I mentioned earlier, external objects or conditions can trigger nostalgia for the past, and, as a result, the inmate experiences homesickness. Levi tells the reader that "here, momentarily far away from the curses and the blows, we can

re-enter into ourselves and meditate," but this feeling does not last very long, because almost immediately "it becomes clear that we will not return" (Survival 55).

Other Auschwitz survivors, including Charlotte Delbo, have also written about their struggle to deal with their homesickness. One of the common ways Levi, Delbo, and others control their homesickness during their imprisonment is developing a social circle among their fellow inmates. In one such example from Delbo's Auschwitz et après, there is a scene where she is working hard outside with the other prisoners, but is "overwhelmed with despair" (105). She pleads to those listening around her, "no, I'm telling you, I can't take it anymore," and cries out, "How will we ever get out of here?" (105). Her workmate, Lulu, carefully watches the kapos and lets Delbo stand behind her to weep. Just before the kapos return, Lulu reminds Delbo that too much nostalgia destroys physical and mental strength: "That's enough now! Back to work. Here she comes" (105).

One of the most prominent examples in Se questo è un uomo of how social interactions provoke or control nostalgia is in the chapter "A Good Day," when the operation of the steam-shovel heightens the imagination of food in Levi and in the other hungry laborers. "As soon as the cold, which throughout the winter had seemed our only enemy, had ceased, we became aware of our hunger" (Survival 73-4). In the essay "Primo Levi goes for soup and remembers Dante," Zvi Jagendorf supports the fact that there is "the need to tell and the need to eat feature prominently" in Se questo è un uomo (33). The inmates know that nostalgia will not help a person survive the Nazi world, but Levi illustrates in this chapter that it is human nature to reflect upon the past. In "A Good

Day," Levi and the other inmates believe it is impossible to "imagine not being hungry," and "the Lager *is* hunger: we ourselves are hunger, living hunger" (Survival 74).

This intense desire to eat affects the inmates' perception of everything around them. Just across the road from where the inmates are standing, a steam-shovel, like an oversized monster devouring its prey "rushes upon the soft, clayey soil and snaps it up voraciously, while a satisfied snort of thick white smoke rises from the control cabin. Then it rises, turns half around, vomits backwards its mouthful and begins again" (Survival 74). Levi and the others are "leaning on our shovels" and "stop to watch, fascinated" and "unable to tear ourselves away from the sight of the steam-shovel's meal" (Survival 74). Breaking the silence of amazement, "one by one, the laborers begin to talk about their best dinner stories, starting with Sigi, who 'is hungrier than everybody'" (Survival 74). Sigi, reminiscing about his Vienna home, "slips into the subject of food and now he talks endlessly of some marriage luncheon and remembers with genuine regret that he failed to finish his third plate of bean soup" (Survival 74). "And everyone tells him to keep quiet," Levi recounts, "but within ten minutes Béla is describing his Hungarian countryside and the fields of maize and a recipe to make meat-pies with corncobs and lard and spices and ... and he is cursed, sworn at and a third one begins to describe. ..." (Survival 74).

The paragraph ends here, as the focus shifts to Levi's memory of his own family's spaghetti. At this point, Levi is "perfectly well aware of how vain these fantasies of hunger are," but his visual memory becomes clearer as

> dancing before my eyes I see the spaghetti which we just cooked [...] at the sorting camp when we suddenly heard the news that we would leave for here the following day; and we were eating it (it was good, yellow, filling), and we stopped, fools, stupid as we were -- if we had known! And if it happens again. (Survival 74)

Immediately after Levi regrets not eating the last batch of spaghetti, he fights off the optimism by rationalizing the situation: "Absurd. If there is one thing sure in this world it is certainly this: that it will not happen to us a second time" (Survival 74). Levi does not explain what "it" refers to, whether being able to eat again, or being sent to Auschwitz. Whichever the interpretation, Levi does not dwell on his memory any further. Instead, Levi focuses on the reasons why the High Numbers (the newer arrivals) can preserve food and "none of us old ones are able to preserve our bread for an hour" (Survival 75). The prisoners continue to stare at Fischer, who "chews slowly and methodically" the half-ration of bread he had kept in his pocket, but no further memories of food or dinners are shared among them, until the work is done (Survival 75). When the siren sounds the end of the day, the inmates "feel good, the Kapo feels no urge to hit us, and we are able to think of our mothers and wives, which usually does not happen" (Survival 76).

Levi's sequence of chapters is significant in terms of his struggle with homesickness and nostalgia. After "The Drowned and the Saved," where he describes müsselmen, Levi recalls himself in different situations where he is confronted with his past and he reacts to them in different ways, depending on the environment, the person he is speaking with, and the social dynamic between them. In "Chemical Examination,"

Levi is selected to be interviewed for a lab position. When Levi is about to be interviewed by Doctor Pannwitz, he is forced to dig up the chemist he once was, and bring out as much knowledge as possible to pass the exam. By this time, many of the long-time prisoners, including Levi, have long since ceased to exercise their basic academic skills. "Balla has a pencil," Levi recounts, "and we all crowd around him. We are not sure if we still know how to write, we want to try" (Survival 104).

In Levi's view, Mendi, who "knows a great number of things" is the only one who is not nervous, but "he is not a chemist" (Survival 104). Before the interview begins, "the German names of compounds and laws float back into my memory" and when Alex arrives, Levi makes the simple declaration, "I am a chemist" (Survival 104). He keeps repeating the phrase "I am a specialist," and naming the areas of chemistry in which he has expertise: "I am a specialist in mine chemistry. I am a specialist in organic syntheses. I am a specialist. ..." (Survival 106). Banner speculates that "in order to pass the examination, Levi must first remember who he is; it is this, more than the recital of formulae, which is the test he faces and which requires an audacity and bravery which would be unnecessary outside Auschwitz" (99).

At the beginning of the interview, Levi shares a massive amount of autobiographical information that has not been previously mentioned in the memoir. But as he mentions these facts, he has "the definite sensation of not being believed, of not even believing it myself" (Survival 106). In the previous episodes, when he tells fellow inmates about his past, trust has never been an issue, or at least it is masked by marked enthusiasm to share it with others. But this interview is not a situation where an external

stimulus triggers Levi's nostalgia or gives him the ability to freely reminisce as he has done before. In this interview, Levi is put in an environment that does not even remotely remind him of the comforts of home. At this point, Levi is well aware that his life is at stake if he does not pass the interview. But being alone in the presence of Doctor Pannwitz, a "tall, thin, blond" man who "has eyes, hair and nose as all Germans ought to have them," does not help Levi recollect his past (Survival 105). Instead, Levi must force himself to remember on what topic he had written his degree thesis in university, and he admits to the reader that he must "make a violent effort to recall that sequence of memories, so deeply buried away: it is as if I was trying to remember the events of a previous incarnation" (Survival 106). Pannwitz asks "*Wo sind Sie geborn*?" which is the polite form of "Where were you born?" Levi mentions that he "took his degree in Turin in 1941, *summa cum laude*" (Survival 106). Levi realizes that "while I say it I have the definite sensation of not being believed, of not even believing it myself," but nevertheless goes through a kind of rebirth, in that he is (unknowingly at the time of the interview) paving the way back to becoming a "man" (Survival 106). Levi proclaims, "Something protects me," that is, Pannwitz' interest in "dielectrical constants" and the Gatterman's book on organic chemistry, which he "studied in Italy in [his] fourth year, at home" (Survival 107). The interview ends and Levi sees Pannwitz "writing down my fate on the white page in incomprehensible symbols" (Survival 107). Nicholas Patruno believes that Levi is "well aware of the absolute control Dr. Pannwitz holds over his very existence" but eventually, he receives a position in the laboratory, which grants him a stronger chance of surviving Auschwitz (Patruno 37).

Banner points out that "in 'Chemical Examination,' he remembers himself as a chemist" and "in 'The Canto of Ulysses' he remembers himself as an educated Italian, perfectly at home in the language of Dante" (Banner 104). "It is significant that 'Chemical Examination' is followed immediately by 'The Canto of Ulysses'; the two chapters are not only closely related by their form and content but they provide access to related aspects of Levi" (Banner 104). In contrast to the tense setting of "Chemical Examination," where Levi is eye-to-eye with the enemy and forced to share as much information about his past as possible, the chapter "The Canto of Ulysses" is when Levi attempts to share as much as he can about his culture and language. Yet, by this time, Levi has been adhering to numerous rules and trying to deal with only the work front of him for so long that "The Canto of Ulysses" illuminates the consequence, which is Levi's painful disconnection from his past.

In "The Canto of Ulysses," Levi introduces Jean, the "Pikolo of the Kommando," with Jean because he is "shrewd and robust, and at the same time gentle and friendly," but, more importantly, continues "his secret individual struggle against death" and does not "neglect his human relationships with less privileged comrades" (Survival 110). While Levi and Jean are walking, Jean "had chosen the path cleverly so that we would have to make a long detour, walking at least an hour, without arousing suspicion" (Survival 111). In such a comfortable setting, Levi and Pikolo "spoke of our houses, of Stratsbourg and Turin, of the books we had read, of what we had studied, our mothers: how all mothers resemble each other!" (Survival 111). Once again, as in the Ka-Be hut, Levi is in a semi-comforting environment where he can share and reminisce about his

past. The interaction between Levi and Pikolo becomes "a scene of memory, of word-fetching, and finally of teaching and storytelling" (Jagendorf 34).

When Pikolo reveals that he "likes Italy, he would like to learn Italian," Levi "would be pleased to teach him Italian" (Survival 112). Dante's "The Canto of Ulysses" pops into Levi's head and he feels "capable of so much" (Survival 112). Levi's pupil asks many questions about Dante, the Divine Comedy, and the structure of the poem. "Jean pays great attention," as Levi begins reciting Dante's poem "slowly and accurately" (Survival 112).

Although Levi has high hopes in teaching Jean about his Italian literary hero, he realizes he has forgotten chunks of verses, which Banner believes "reveal the vagaries of memory and its uncontrollability" (106). When he gives Pikolo a rushed Italian lesson in the soup queue, Levi cannot remember what comes after the lines "Language, the tip of it flickered to and fro/Threw out a voice and answered: 'When I came. …'" (Survival 112). At this point, Levi is stuck: "And after 'When I came?' Nothing. A hole in my memory" (Survival 112). He remembers the phrase "Before Aeneas ever named it so" but then he encounters "another hole, afragment floats into [his] mind, not relevant" (Survival 112). All he can remember are the lines with references to the sea.

There is distance in Levi's voice as he stops and reminisces about the sea, "the open sea: Pikolo has traveled by sea, and knows what it means: it is when the horizon closes in on itself, free, straight ahead and simple, and there is nothing but the smell of the sea; sweet things, ferociously far away" (Survival 113). Levi's homesickness erupts as he remembers the line "When at last hove up a mountain" (Survival 114). He

imagines "the mountains when one sees them in the distance" and laments, "the mountains ... oh, Pikolo, Pikolo, say something, speak, do not let me think of my mountains which used to show up against the dusk of the evening as I returned by train from Milan to Turin!" (Survival 114). He tries to shove the memories down into an abyss as he proclaims, "Enough, one must go on, these are things that one thinks but does not say" (Survival 114). At this point, the reader believes that Jean serves as an opposite of Doctor Pannewitz, in that Jean brings out in Levi, an emotional connection with his home and academic knowledge. Unlike the cold, factual lessons of science, Levi now concentrates on a cultural piece of literature, which is full of different interpretations and theological lessons.

As they approach the soup line, Levi desperately tries to piece together Dante's poem: "I would give today's soup to know how to connect 'the like on any day' to the last lines. I try to reconstruct it through the rhymes, I close my eyes, I bite my fingers – but it is no use" (Survival 114). But the possibility that "tomorrow Pikolo or [Levi] might be dead", or that they "might never see each other again" puts tremendous amounts of pressure on Levi to remember the crucial lines (Survival 115). Levi tries to keep Pikolo back, as "it is virtually necessary and urgent that he listen, that he understand this 'as pleased Another' before it is too late" (Survival 115). Suddenly, Levi has a rush of information he wants to explain to his fellow inmate in regards to the poem, "about the Middle Ages, about the so human and so necessary and yet unexpected anachronism, but still, something gigantic, which I myself have only just seen, in a flash of intuition, perhaps the reason for our fate, for our being here today" (Survival 115).

Levi's nostalgia for Italy and a poem representative of its great culture has turned into a philosophical lesson, one which he does not have time to teach Pikolo before arriving at the queue, "among the sordid, ragged crowd of soup-carriers" (Survival 115). Banner concludes that both chapters, "Chemical Examination" and "The Canto of Ulysses," are "dismaying" in that both end in "horror and poignancy" (Banner 108). Levi's "The Canto of Ulysses" ends with the line, "And over our heads the hollow seas closed up" (Survival 115). Zvi Jagendorf believes that in Dante's poem, Ulysses' speech "comes to its sonorous end with a vision of the watery gates of death closing over the hero" (Jagendorf 46). Levi is forced to return from the depths of exploring Dante's poem to face the brutal reality of the Lager. As he proceeds in the soup line, he only remembers the line "And over our heads the hollow seas closed up" which concludes the chapter (Survival 115). Levi's nostalgia for Italy and the connection to one of its greatest literary masterpieces quickly dissipates.

In the following chapter, Levi explains to the reader that he and some other prisoners are considered "old Häftlinge," because "our wisdom lay in 'not trying to understand,' not imagining the future, not tormenting ourselves as to how and when it would all be over; not asking others or ourselves any questions" (Survival 116). Levi goes on to say:

> We preserved the memories of our previous life, but blurred and remote, profoundly sweet and sad, like the memories of early infancy. While for everybody, the moment of entry into the camp was the starting point of a different sequence of thoughts, those near and sharp, continually

> confirmed by present experience, like wounds re-opened every day. (Survival 116)

Each prisoner enters the camp at a different stage in life, and is forced to start a new one. Because of this transition, time no longer has value to the prisoners, and for them, "history had stopped" (Survival 117). The prisoners "had thought that anything would be preferable to the monotony of the identical and inexorably long days, to the systematic and ordered squalor of the Buna at work," but "were forced to change our minds when the Buna began to fall in pieces around us" as the prisoners "returned in the long, windy evenings of the Polish summer to find the camp upside down" (Survival118). At this point, the prisoners "were too destroyed to be really afraid" (Survival 118).

Levi is able to train himself to control his homesickness so that he can work and survive in the camps, and even though Levi does not mention any episodes of nostalgia or homesickness in the next three chapters, his yearning for home and his past life do not dissipate. He shows throughout Se questo è un uomo that to suppress the past is vital to avoid severe punishment or execution in Auschwitz, but completely forgetting one's origins and history do not affirm his definition of, or identity as, a "man". Many inmates ask themselves how long they have been, or will be, imprisoned. "If we were logical, we would resign ourselves to the evidence that our fate is beyond knowledge" but Levi knows that human beings are "rarely logical when their own fate is at stake" (Survival 36). Levi opens his fifteenth chapter, "Die drei Leute vom Labor," with many questions that he and Alberto ponder: "How many months have gone by since we entered the camp? How many since the day I was dismissed from the Ka-Be? And since the day of

the chemistry examination? And since the October selection?" (Survival 136). Levi gives the reader estimates of how many Italians are still alive from their convoy, and asks, "How many of us will be alive at the new year? How many when spring begins?" (Survival 136). These very questions contradict what Levi describes earlier as the "wisdom" he possesses as an old Häftling in chapter twelve. The reader now understands that Levi is not the typical "old Häftling" who does not try to understand, who does not ask questions, or who does not ask how and when it will be over. Instead, Levi cannot suppress his fears and inquisitiveness for long. When Levi hears "rumours about the legendary battle of the Warsaw ghetto" and that "the Germans liquidated the Lubin camp over a year ago," he asks, "When will it be our turn?" (Survival 137).

Levi's contradiction is emphasized more when he begins to work in the laboratory, one that is "surprisingly like any other laboratory" (Survival 139). Old Häftlinge, the ones who have survived the camp the longest, are not known to hold on to their past, as it prevents them from further adapting to the new world order. But as Levi points out the various laboratory furniture and instruments, nostalgia flares up like a Bunsen burner: "The smell makes me start back as if from the blow of a whip: the weak aromatic smell of organic chemistry laboratories. For a moment the large semidark room at the university, my fourth year, the mild air of May in Italy comes back to me with brutal violence and immediately vanishes" (Survival 139).

As in the Ka-Be, Levi is placed in an environment where he is sufficiently comfortable physically that nostalgia flows naturally. Although nostalgia is "typically triggered by a threatening stimulus," Levi's nostalgia for his university lab is triggered by

what Sedikides, Wildschut and Baden would label as "fortuitous stimuli" (Sedikides 11). However, because of his long imprisonment and disconnection with his native Italy, Levi's nostalgia only lasts for a few seconds. Even though Levi knows he will "suffer neither hunger nor cold this winter," his Häftling wisdom gets the better of him, as he reminds himself that "all this is the gift of fortune, to be enjoyed as intensely as possible and at once: for there is no certainty about tomorrow" (Survival 140).

When Levi is standing next to Alberto in the laboratory, he "finds at my side the comrade of all my peaceful moments, of the Ka-Be, of the rest Sundays" and attempts to alleviate "the pain of remembering, the old ferocious suffering of feeling myself a man again, which attacks me like a dog the moment my conscious comes out of the gloom" (Survival 142). Armed with a notebook and pencil, he writes "what I would never dare tell anyone" (Survival 142).

But in the very last chapter, "The Story of Ten Days," when the Greek barber arrives, Levi asks if "there was anything new" (Survival 152). The barber answers, "Morgen, alle Kamarad weg" (Tomorrow all Kamarad away) (Survival 152). What is interesting here is that Levi does not translate the barber's phrase. Assuming the reader does not understand German, the reader, like Levi, is also unmoved by the statement. On the other hand, if the reader does understand German, the reader would understand, after reading this far in the memoir, how indifferent Levi has become. The barber expects a dramatic reaction from Levi, but "the news excited no direct emotion in me. Already for many months I had no longer felt any pain, joy or fear, except in that detached and distant manner characteristic of the Lager, which might be described as conditional" (Survival

152). Levi continues, "If I still had my former sensitivity, I thought, this would be an extremely moving moment" (Survival 152). This contrasts with how he feels in the very beginning of the memoir, where he describes "the man who leaves the Ka-Be" as one who "searches for a human contact and only finds backs turned on him. He is as helpless and vulnerable as a new-born baby, but the following morning he will still have to march to work" (Survival 57).

His sensitivity for others' emotions has also become blunted with impatience. When he tells the other prisoners, "Tomorrow they are going to evacuate the camp," the listeners "overwhelm me with questions" because they know he is "an old prisoner" (Survival 153). Even though Levi tells them he does not know anything more, the prisoners continue to berate him with inquiries. "How stupid of them!" Levi exclaims, and then says, "but of course, they had only been in the Lager for a week and had not yet learnt that one did not ask questions" (Survival 153).

Later, when the two Frenchmen arrive, they do not understand the classification process and are "frightened" (Survival 156). Levi "translated the speech of the SS man. I was annoyed that they should be afraid: they had not even experienced a month of the Lager, they hardly suffered from hunger yet, they were not even Jews, but they were afraid" (Survival 156).

However, shortly afterwards, Levi's impatience turns into empathy. After the Germans abandon the camp, Charles, Arthur and Levi crowd around the stove in their hut and "felt ourselves become men once again" (Survival 171). Most importantly, they

> could speak of everything. I grew enthusiastic at Arthur's account of how one passed the Sunday at Provenchères in the Vosges, and Charles almost cried when I told him the story of the armistice in Italy, of the turbid and desperate beginning of the Partisan resistance, of the man who betrayed us and of our capture in the mountains. (Survival 171)

For the first time in many months, the survivors of the death camp are able to share each other's stories of their home and history, and express emotions openly, as free human beings. Levi and the survivors are no longer forced to suppress, or attempt to erase, their past.

Chapter Three: Levi and Identity

According to Ariella Lang, in Auschwitz, all prisoners are "coercively and wholly defined as Other" by the Lager, which denies "victims any identity whatsoever" and tries to "erase their very existence as human beings" (3). As the episodes in Se questo è un uomo unfold, Primo Levi describes various inmates who have become a subject of this exploitation. By focusing on these individuals, Levi subtly reinforces the notion that he is a "man" by differentiating himself from those who are considered "drowned" and those who continue to survive but do not retain any human qualities. But throughout his imprisonment, Levi struggles between two psychological states that determine his chances of survival -- one of adaptation and adeptness, and another of bereavement for the past. At the same time, one can see that the structure of his memoir underscores how the behaviors of other inmates influence where he places himself in the definition of "man."

At the very beginning of the memoir, Levi describes himself as "twenty-four, with little wisdom, no experience," and when he is interrogated by the Fascist Militia, he identifies himself as an "Italian citizen of Jewish race" (Survival 13). Within a few weeks, he is transported to Auschwitz, where he and other captives "are transformed into the phantoms glimpsed yesterday evening" and where "nothing belongs to us any more" (Survival 26-7). Shortly after the prisoners arrive at Auschwitz, the Germans relentlessly strip away "our clothes, our shoes, even our hair," and to further reduce the prisoners' identity, they replace names with numbers. By receiving a tattoo of the numbers on the left arm, Levi is formally "baptized" into the camp congregation (Survival 27). In a

matter of weeks, Levi's physique quickly changes from that of a healthy young man to that of a nearly emaciated entity, but he still manages to survive. Unlike his physical condition, however, his psychological state is much more subtly transformed during his imprisonment. As Levi adjusts to the camp living conditions, he becomes more aware of the behavioral tendencies among the prisoners, and discerns which inmate he should associate with or try to avoid.

In the beginning of his imprisonment, Levi immediately joins a group which shares his culture and language. With nothing tangible left to remind them of their past, Levi and his fellow Italian prisoners attempt to support each other by meeting "every Sunday evening in a corner of the Lager" (Survival 37). But a point is reached when they can "hardly recognize each other" and they notice that fewer and fewer of them are alive each time (Survival 37). The Italians stop meeting abruptly because they can no longer bear "to see each other ever more deformed and more squalid" (Survival 37). The group disbands, leaving everyone psychologically and socially isolated, including Levi, who is disappointed that he can no longer stay with his fellow countrymen. Lynn Gunzberg suggests that "such trauma is so great that the individual feels himself utterly alone as perhaps never before, though he is crowded together with others in his identical condition" (12). Forced to bunk with many dying strangers, Levi is not able to form any sort of bond with another human being, and he must build enough mental strength on his own to withstand the long hours of physical labor and manipulation of his identity.

With no chances of creating a social connection with the Italians, Levi must face ethnic generalizations alone. He knows very well that the Germans call Italian Jews

"'*zwei linke Hände* (two left hands)', and even the Polish Jews despise them as they do not speak Yiddish" (Survival 49). One such example is in the chapter "Ka-Be," where Levi injures his foot and is sent to the infirmary. When he becomes "tired of standing on his wounded foot" and is "hungry and frozen," he tries to find out from a Polish patient and a nurse when the Germans will let him enter (Survival 48). Instead of an answer, the Pole and the nurse "talked and laughed together without replying as if I were not there" (Survival 49). Levi is treated like the laughingstock of a joke when "one of them took my arm and looked at my number and then both laughed still more strongly" (Survival 49). Levi's foot wound quickly becomes nothing compared to the gash on his dignity. Humiliated and angry, Levi wishes he "had never in all [his] life undergone an affront worse than this" (Survival 49). He realizes that even though he may be seen physically as a human being, he is treated like an inanimate object: "the nurse points to my ribs to show the other, as if I was a corpse in an anatomy class" (Survival 49).

Levi waits a few more hours in the queue before he is able to enter the infirmary. When he finally gets to the front, "someone in a brand-new striped suit" asks Levi a few basic questions: "where I was born, what profession I practised 'as a civilian,'" (Survival 49). When Levi distinguishes the phrase "as a civilian," he again illustrates the social ladder of the camp, especially how others distinguish between those who live in the outside world, and those imprisoned under the Germans. The word "civilian" in this camp is not the distinction between an ordinary citizen and military personnel as it is often used in the outside world. Rather, Levi implies that the word is used to distinguish between "civilized" and "subhuman." Levi is amazed at the "whole series of questions"

this person asks (Survival 49). He skeptically asks himself, "What use could they be? Is this a complicated rehearsal to make fools of us? Could this be the hospital?" and adds in an impatient tone of voice, "they make us stand naked and answer questions" (Survival 49). Levi is appalled at being treated as if he were an animal with no feelings of shame or need for warm clothes. Only after submitting himself to answer the questions is he allowed into the dormitory.

Ka-Be is described as "a life of limbo" where "material discomforts are relatively few" and where "it is not cold, there is no work to do, and unless you commit some grave fault, you are not beaten" (Survival 50). When Levi bunks with other patients, he gets a small dose of companionship from them, but that is only because everyone is bonded by one event: death. The sick are in more danger of being selected to go to the crematoriums than the laborers outside of the Ka-Be. When Walter tells Levi that he is suffering from "*Körperschwäche*," which is a disease that "cannot be cured," Levi still does not understand the consequences facing his fellow bunkmates. Everyone around him hesitates to explain until Schmulek speaks up, and even then, only hints at the fact that the selections do indeed occur and that the crematoria exist (Survival 52).

Levi realizes that it is difficult to keep acquaintances in the Ka-Be as "destiny ordained that I was soon to understand" the nearness of death (Survival 53). Later that evening, Levi witnesses the selection process "all clearly": the SS crosses out Schmulek's number, and the very next day Schmulek is led out. When Schmulek's group leaves the Ka-Be for the gas chambers, "nobody said good-bye" and "nobody gave them messages

for healthy comrades" (Survival 53). For a while afterwards, Levi avoids looking at Walter in shame for being naïve and asking many questions about the crematoria.

The Ka-Be is "without its physical discomforts," but is "crammed with suffering humanity," because the patients are left alone with their memories of the outside world and their philosophical rhetoric (Survival 55). As the prisoners talk to each other about their past, they are able to "re-enter into ourselves and meditate," and become more aware that they "will not return" (Survival 55).

> We travelled here in the sealed wagons; we saw our women and our children leave towards nothingness; we were transformed into slaves, have marched a hundred times backwards and forwards to our silent labours, killed in our spirit long before our anonymous death. (Survival 55)

Everyone in Levi's bunk "begins to consider what they have made us become, how much they have taken away from us, what this life is" (Survival 55). To ask "what this life is" is an example of what makes each patient a human being, in that they contemplate a purpose for their existence by contrasting the events of their past with the complex conditions of the present. Through their introspection, they realize that their personalities are "fragile" and their mental states are "much more in danger than our life," because in the camp, psychological manipulation can become an overwhelmingly powerful control device (Survival 53). With this acknowledgment, the prisoners expect that no one who is imprisoned under the Nazis will survive and "carry to the world, together with the sign impressed on his skin, the evil tidings of what man's presumption made of man in Auschwitz" (Survival 55).

After twenty days, Levi, "the man who leaves the Ka-Be, naked and almost always insufficiently cured, feels himself ejected into the dark and cold of sidereal space" (Survival 57). His isolation hits rock bottom when he "searches for a human contact and only finds backs turned on him" (Survival 57). Levi has tried either to connect with a group which shares the same cultural background, or seek help from those whom he views as likely to be humanitarian, such as the nurse. In every instance, Levi is forced to be alone again, and the uncertainty of whether or not he can survive the camp conditions is amplified the longer he remains without a support system.

But Levi is not alone for very long. After he is discharged from the Ka-Be, Levi is sent to Block 45, where he joins Alberto. Alberto is an Italian Jew, and becomes his best friend in the camp primarily because "none of [the other] Italians have shown an equal capacity for adaptation" (Survival 57). To Levi, Alberto's ability to "understand everything at once" as well as his knowledge of "whom to corrupt, whom to avoid" and "whose compassion to arouse," makes him a vital companion in Auschwitz (Survival 57). Levi watches Alberto's behavior carefully as he sees that Alberto "knows a little French but understands whatever the Germans and Poles tell him. He replies in Italian and with gestures, he makes himself understood and at once wins sympathy" (Survival 57). Most importantly, Alberto is the type of prisoner who "fights for his life but still remains everybody's friend," while other prisoners in the camp cannot even form trusting relationships with each other, let alone help themselves (Survival 57). Levi learns that Alberto is "the rare figure of the strong yet peace-loving man against whom the weapons of night are blunted" (Survival 57).

But it is not just friendship that creates Levi's new identity in the camp. Lynn Gunzberg's essay, "Down among the Dead Men: Levi and Dante in Hell," which juxtaposes Dante's poem Inferno with Levi's memoir, illustrates how "the concept of having arrived on the bottom carries with it the determination to climb out" (19). Gunzberg believes that "during his journey through Hell, Levi meets a number of people from whom he gains the insights necessary to turn the system to his advantage" (19). As Levi works in the camp, he learns that chances of surviving depend on the personality of prisoners, and concludes that the typical inmate of Auschwitz is "a hollow man, reduced to suffering and needs, forgetful of dignity and restraint" (Survival 27). By comparing Auschwitz prisoners with citizens of the outside world, Levi explains that "in ordinary life [...] it rarely happens that a man loses himself. A man is normally not alone, and in his rise or fall is tied to the destinies of his neighbours; so that it is exceptional for anyone to acquire unlimited power, or to fall by a succession of defeats into utter ruin" (Survival 88). However, "in the Lager things are different: here the struggle to survive is without respite, because everyone is desperately and ferociously alone" (Survival 88). Thus, Levi takes responsibility for himself in distinguishing between those he should associate or identity with, and those he avoids completely, for the sake of living one more day.

Levi learns about survival from a wide range of prisoners, including Null Achtzehn, whom Levi designates as "drowned," and Jean, who abides by the rule that "to save oneself one needed constantly to hone and apply intellectual faculties" (Gunzberg 21). Gunzberg analyzes Levi's encounters with Null Achtzehn and Jean, but does not go into detail about the inmates who stand in the middle of the spectrum between "drowned"

and Levi's definition of "man," including Schepshel, Alfred L., Elias, and Henri, who are highlighted in the chapter "The Drowned and the Saved." Analyzing these individuals is important because each exemplify something between "drowned" and "man" (Survival 90). In the memoir, Levi does not specify when exactly he encounters these individuals, or whether he comes to a conclusion about each of the prisoners -- during or after his imprisonment. Levi can take the time to reflect on these four men because he has survived Auschwitz and is securely at home in Turin, writing this chapter. Nevertheless, Levi has a deeper reason for illuminating the four individuals, in the context of his own identity as a prisoner.

In the chapter "The Drowned and the Saved," Levi explains the definition of "müsselmen," and offers his personal philosophical and psychological analysis of the four individuals who influence the transformation of his identity by being an example of what could happen to him, should he continue living in the camp. Levi first introduces Schepschel, who "has been living in the Lager for four years," and is "grown accustomed to thinking of himself only as a sack which needs periodic refilling" (Survival 93). Schepschel can function physically to sustain his vital needs, but he is barely present emotionally. Levi believes that "one would be inclined to think of Schepschel with indulgent sympathy, as a poor wretch who retains only a humble and elementary desire to live, and who bravely carries on his small struggle not to give way" (Survival 93). Schepschel accepts the belief that he will remain in the camp for the rest of his life, and, therefore, he has nothing to live for but the next piece of bread. He is the type who does not know the price of his actions, because "when the opportunity showed itself, he did

not hesitate to have Moischl, his accomplice in a theft from the kitchen, condemned to a flogging, in the mistaken hope of gaining favour from the *Blockältester*," and thus ruined his own chances of becoming a "vat-washer" (Survival 93).

But what distinguishes Schepschel from the state of a müsselman is that müsselmen, according to Levi, do not have "distinguished acquaintances in camp," and cannot "gain any extra rations" (Survival 89). Schepschel "steals a broom in Buna and sells it to the *Blockältester*" and "when he manages to set aside a little bread capital, he hires the tools of the cobbler in the Block, his compatriot" (Survival 93). To have an acquaintance who is a cobbler is vital to any prisoner, because in Auschwitz, "death begins with the shoes," and to have shoes that do not fit well puts the inmate in danger of "'dicke Füsse' (swollen feet)," a condition which has no cure (Survival 34-5). Schepschel has also been seen "singing and dancing in front of the hut of the Slovak workers, who sometimes reward him with the remainders of their soup" (Survival 93). Although Levi hears this second-hand from Sigi, merely including this unconfirmed incident in the description of Schepschel's character puts Schepschel in a different light than the müsselmen who drag themselves to work everyday.

Levi introduces Alfred L. as a prisoner who "shows among other things how vain is the myth of original equality among men" (Survival 93). It is unclear in the memoir if Levi learned about Alfred L.'s prewar story during or after Auschwitz, but he describes it as a time when he was a "robust man of about fifty" who held an executive position in a famous chemical factory. Even though Alfred L. was "very wasted away" by the time he met Levi-as-a-prisoner, he "still showed on his face the signs of a disciplined and

methodological energy" (Survival 93). Alfred L. empowers his aggressive business-like nature by taking "every care not to be confused with the mass; he worked with stubborn duty, even occasionally admonishing his lazy comrades in a persuasive and deprecatory tone of voice," and "to complete the separation, he always behaved in his relations with his comrades with the maximum courtesy compatible with his egotism, which was absolute" (Survival 95). In addition, he judges a newcomer of the Kommando "with extreme severity, especially when faced with those in whom he smelled possible rivals" (Survival 95). He manages to survive every day without forming any bond with others, and prefers to hoard as much as he can.

In retrospect, Levi does not know what happened to Alfred L. after Auschwitz. However, he suspects that because Alfred L.'s extreme competitiveness remained even under Nazi oppression, "it is quite probable that he managed to escape death, and today is still living his cold life of the determined and the joyless dominator" (Survival 95). Alfred L. may still see himself as one above others, but Levi does not; in Levi's view, Alfred L. is definitely not a müsselman, but also lacks the proper communication and social skills needed to work harmoniously with others in the outside world.

Elias is another excellent candidate for surviving Auschwitz, but one who would not be able to survive the outside world. Levi does not know what happened in Elias's life before or after Auschwitz, but he remembers Elias's physical composure vividly and describes his enormous strength with fascination. With similes such as "like a poised animal" and "like a monkey," Elias is described more like a beast than a human being. When describing Elias's face, Levi specifically defines "battering ram" as "an instrument

made for butting," but it could very well be interpreted as the expression of an angry ram butting into its enemy, because "a sense of bestial vigour emanates" from him (Survival 95). Thus, Levi is convinced that Elias "would serve as a good model for a Hercules" and is someone who "shows the instinctive astuteness of wild animals" (Survival 95-97). In addition, when Elias speaks, "it is impossible to keep him to a coherent conversation," because he "talks continuously on the most varied of subjects; always in an oratorical manner, with the violent mimicry of the deranged" (Survival 96).

For all of these reasons, Levi concludes that Elias has "survived the destruction from the outside because he is physically indestructible" but he has also "resisted the annihilation from within because he is insane" (Survival 97). Levi speculates that because Elias's is such an extreme form of adaptation to the conditions of Auschwitz, "he will be confined to the fringes of human society, in a prison or lunatic asylum" should he be liberated (Survival 97-8).

Just the opposite of Elias is Henri, who "is eminently civilized and sane" (Survival 98). Henri's intellectual capacity surpasses other inmates because he "speaks French, German, English and Russian, has an excellent scientific and classical culture" (Survival 98). Levi paints a picture of Henri as the camp erudite because "there is nothing in the camp that he does not know and about which he has not reasoned," and, "of his conquests, he speaks with educated modesty" (Survival 100). Henri "has cut off every tie of affection" and "fights to live without distraction with all the resources that he can derive from his quick intellect and his refined education" (Survival 98).

When Levi interacts with Henri, there is a feeling of warmth and nearness, and "communication, even affection seems possible. One seems to glimpse, behind his uncommon personality, a human soul" (Survival 100). Levi learns from Henri that "there are three methods open to man to escape extermination which still allow him to retain the name of man: organization, pity, and theft" (Survival 98). Henri "practices all three" and has many friends in the Lager, Ka-Be, and Buna who could help him survive, and Levi emphasizes that "to speak with Henri is useful and pleasant" by repeating it twice in two subsequent paragraphs. However, just as Henri's vulnerable feelings come out from his heavily protected shell, "the next moment his sad smile freezes into a cold grimace," and he becomes "hard and distant, enclosed in armour, the enemy of all, inhumanely cunning and incomprehensible like the Serpent in Genesis" (Survival 100). Like Alfred L., Henri is a reminder for Levi that equality among the inmates does not exist. "Henri is perfectly aware of his natural gifts and exploits them with the cold competence of a physicist using a scientific instrument," and Levi realizes that "from all my talks with Henri, even the most cordial, I have always left with a slight taste of defeat; of also having been, somehow inadvertently, not a man to him, but an instrument in his hands" (Survival 100). Henri's view of Levi exemplifies the difference in their definition of "man." A "man" to Levi is not someone who uses his intelligence solely to boost himself above others in times of crisis. When Levi becomes the philosophical erudite in "The Canto of Ulysses," he views his pupil as a fellow man, because he wants to teach Jean that the message of Dante's poem has something to do "with all men who toil, and with us in particular; that

it has to do with us two, who dare to reason of these things with the poles for the soup on our shoulders" (Survival 114).

Knowing the stories of Schepschel, Elias, Alfred L., and Henri, how would Levi identify himself as a "man"? A key to answering this question is in the analysis of Levi's behavior in the camps. As I mentioned earlier, Levi enters Auschwitz as a naïve high-numbered prisoner with many questions. Levi realizes from the beginning that the condition in Monowitz "kills inmates slowly while torturing them psychologically" and this is "the expression of the most malevolent betrayal because it preys on helpless captives" (Gunzberg 24). But the longer Levi remains in the camp, the more he adjusts his outlook in accordance with those who are also willing break what the outside world would call "civilized" social conventions. Through his observation of the other inmates in the camp, Levi knows that if he does not discard the social norms of the outside world and retain the lessons of the Lager system, including language, the chances of surviving Auschwitz become slim. Towards the end of the memoir, Levi becomes an "old Häftlinge" because by then his "wisdom lay in 'not trying to understand,' not imagining the future, not tormenting ourselves as to how and when it would all be over; not asking others or ourselves any questions" (Survival 116). In the chapter "Behavior in Extreme Situations: Coercion," Bruno Bettelheim takes a psychoanalytical view on surviving Auschwitz, and confirms Levi's reasoning by explaining that "large scale executions of old prisoners were rare," because the chances for survival increased as the inmate learned how to live in the camp (Bettelheim 19).

Levi expands on his theory of breaking the laws of the outside world by focusing on the justification for stealing in the chapter "This Side of Good and Evil." In the Lager, Levi finds that there are "two particularly well differentiated categories among men -- the saved and the drowned" (Survival 87). Levi is giving the reader a clear description of the Black Market years after he is liberated, but at this point in the memoir, Levi is learning that "theft in Buna is the only and regular way of provisioning" (Survival 83). With no spoon or shoes, a prisoner can avoid severe punishment or death by stealing another inmate's possessions, even of those which were once owned by the prisoners taken to the crematorium. In "This Side of Good and Evil," Levi takes a break from showing his experiences through dialogue and gives an in-depth description of the Black Market's economic structure. Levi explains that "although every exchange is explicitly forbidden, scores of prisoners driven desperate by hunger prowl around" and there are some prisoners "with savage patience" who would even go as far as trading their bread for "a few pieces of potato" (Survival 78). Everything is sold at a price, including vegetables, pieces of cloth, Mahorca ("third-rate tobacco"), and spoons, the most important item in the camp (Survival 79). It is in the market where "you can find specialists in kitchen thefts," Levi describes, "their jackets swollen with strange bulges" (Survival 79).

Ka-Be is considered "the main customer and receiver of thefts occurring in Buna" especially for items used as medical equipment, such as thermometers and chemicals (Survival 85). Using this knowledge by practicing the art of stealing, one can avoid punishment by obtaining items needed to pass the morning inspections and get through the grilling roll call process. Levi admits he is no exception to participating in this

underground exchange because "it was our idea, mine and Alberto's, to steal the rolls of graph-paper from the thermographs of the Desiccation Department and offer them to the Medical Chief of the Ka-Be with the suggestion that they be used as paper for pulse-temperature charts" (Survival 85-6). Near the end of the chapter, he concludes that

> theft in Buna, punished by the civil direction, is authorized and encouraged by the SS; theft in the camp, severely repressed by the SS, is considered by the civilians as a normal exchange operation, theft among the Häftlinge is generally punished, but the punishment strikes the thief and the victim with equal gravity. (Survival 86)

He then asks the reader to consider the words "good" and "evil," "just" and "unjust," but for my discussion of Levi's identity, the meaning of those words are contemplated in terms of analyzing his behavior in Auschwitz.

In the next chapter, "The Drowned and the Saved," Levi defines "müsselmanner" at length (Survival 88). "To sink is the easiest of matters; it is enough to carry out all the orders one receives, to eat only the ration, to observe the discipline of the work and the camp. Experience shows that only the exceptional could one survive more than three months in this way" (Survival 90). A "müsselman," in Levi's perspective, is one who is an anonymous mass, continually renewed and always identical [...] who march and labour in silence" and that "the divine spark dead within them" makes them "already too empty to really suffer" (Survival 90). Hauntingly, "all the müsselmans who finished in the gas chambers have the same story, or more exactly, have no story; they followed the slope down to the bottom, like streams that run down to the sea" (Survival 90). The

müsselmen are those who chose not to renounce "one's moral world" or who cling onto the past and therefore cannot help themselves even when death is staring at them in the face (Survival 92). With this explanation in mind, "good," "evil," "just," and "unjust" have completely different connotations in the camp than in the outside world. A person in the outside world has been raised to understand that stealing is "evil" and "unjust" because it breaks the moral code of conduct and disrupt the order of society. However, in the camp, stealing is considered "good" and "just" because human lives are at stake, and abiding by the code of conduct of the Lager camp is imperative to protect and preserve one's life for as long as possible.

After Levi receives a position as a chemist, he partakes in the art of stealing when he is placed in a laboratory where he can "steal and sell soap and petrol without risk" and can go in and out without being questioned (Survival 141). When Alberto and Levi talk to each other on the return march in "The Last One," they talk of "three new exploits" (Survival 146). Levi even goes as far as revealing how he carried out his clever ideas by explaining how he smuggled a broom into the Lager on the return march: "I took apart the handle and the head of the broom, sawing the former into two pieces and carrying the various parts separately into the camp (the two pieces of the handle tied to my thighs inside my trousers)" (Survival 146). He ends his report with a feeling of marked accomplishment: "the whole business took only four days" (Survival 146). Levi uses adjectives that emphasize his and Alberto's "achievements": "brain-child," "masterpiece," "brilliant development," all which would increase their "personal prestige" if they could talk about it more openly (Survival 146-8).

Yet what separates Levi from those like Schepschel or Elias is that he is able to share his wealth of intellectual knowledge with others. In the chapter "Chemical Examination," Levi is able to recall details of his organic chemistry degree thesis and essential words in German such as "sulphuric acid," "atmospheric pressure," and "short-wave generator" (Survival 107). Levi's specialized knowledge helps him pass the chemical exam, and he eventually gets a job in the laboratory. In "The Canto of Ulysses," Levi recites lines from Dante's poem with Jean. Both of these chapters remind the reader that Levi is still a man -- one who is still in control of his cognitive and problem-solving abilities. What marks Levi's "battle for survival" is his "inner struggle to maintain his reason, defined by his moral values" (Lang 3).

In the camps, Levi is not considered an "old Häftling" solely on the basis of the length of time he has been in the camps. To become this "old Häftling," he has been able to disavow the rules and regulations that structure the outside world, and successfully adapt to and incorporate the standards of the camp. But even though Levi has been able to survive each day by stealing goods and paying attention to the behavior and consequences of other prisoners, the reader sees a constant struggle between his impatience with new inmates and his own tether to his past. In fact, his intelligence gets the best of him when he becomes an old Häftling and deals with Kraus, a new prisoner. Lynn Gunzberg believes that because other inmates have deceived Levi in the past, Levi himself turns around and deceives others, once he becomes an "old Häftlinge" (24). Gunzberg points out that when Levi meets Kraus, Levi is "well-schooled in how to deal with a recent arrival, a 'high number,' especially one who, like himself at the very

beginning, is clinging to his past" (24). As an example of how he differentiates himself from the newer, "at-risk" prisoners, Levi tells Kraus about a dream that he never had, in which Kraus came and visited his house in Turin. In short, "I saw him, this very Kraus Páli, with hair grown, clean and well nourished and dressed as a free man, with a loaf of bread in his hand" and "I gave him food and drink and a good bed to sleep in, and it was nighttime, but there was a wonderful warmth" (Survival 134). Hearing this dream, Kraus reacts with "solemn gestures" that Levi interprets as "making promises and prophesies" (Survival 135). "Poor silly Kraus," Levi tells the reader, "if only he knew that it is not true, that I have really dreamt nothing about him, that he is nothing to me except for a brief moment, nothing like everything is nothing down here" (Survival 135). This "prank" illuminates Levi's attitude which, according to Gunzberg, "represents his ability to rise above his status as victim: to impart wisdom (even if it is not understood) while venting his moment of anger and punishing Kraus for his stupidity" (25).

However, if Levi claims that "nothing like everything is nothing down here," why does he, in the very next chapter, spill out so many questions regarding his imprisonment? (Survival 135). In "*Die drei Leute vom Labor*," Levi begins with "How many months have gone by since we entered the camp? How many since the day I was dismissed from Ka-Be? And since the day of the chemistry examination? And since the October selection?" (Survival 136).

Levi admits that "Alberto and I often ask ourselves these questions, and many others as well" (Survival 136). Levi's venting and pleading surfaces when he continues with more statistics and questions: "we were ninety-six when we arrived, we, the Italians

of convoy 174,000; only twenty-nine of use survived until October, and of these, eight went in the selection. We are now twenty-one and winter has hardly begun. How many of us will be alive in the new year? How many when spring begins?" (Survival 136). These thoughts starkly contrast with the attitude he has towards Kraus and the new arrivals in general. Levi is clearly worried about how many other fellow Italians are still alive with him in the camp, and those numbers serve as a reminder of where he is. Gunzberg argues that it is Levi's belief that to "maintain and strengthen his sense of justice in the face of horror and suffering" is "the way to remain a man" (27). Without the humanistic connections with Alberto, Jean or Lorenzo, he would have never survived or become a "complete" man in the environment like Auschwitz.

One of the most important people Levi encounters in Auschwitz is Lorenzo, an Italian civilian worker at the Buna installation. Lorenzo's conduct was atypical of the civilian behavior toward the Häftlinge in the camp, because many of the civilians saw the degraded and disfigured slaves as deserving of their fate even when they threw them potatoes or bread. Lorenzo is the only civilian who treats Levi as an equal, by becoming Levi's protector in bringing him what was left of his ration every day for six months, giving him a vest, writing a postcard on his behalf to Italy, and bringing him back the reply (Survival 119). Moreover, according to Levi, "for all this he neither asked nor accepted any reward, because he was good and simple" (Survival 119). The virtue of Lorenzo is an example of Levi's definition of a "man," a selfless, giving individual (Survival 119). Long after Levi introduces Lorenzo, Levi, too, practices selflessness when Jean asks him to teach Italian.

Whether Lorenzo's generosity is carried out simply because they are both Italians, is difficult to confirm; nevertheless, Lorenzo's magnanimous gestures lead Levi to this affirmation:

> it was really due to Lorenzo that I am alive today; and not so much for his material aid, as for his having constantly reminded me by his presence, by his natural and plain manner of being good, that there still existed a just world outside our own ... a remote possibility of good, but for which it was worth surviving. (Survival 121)

Levi concludes that "Lorenzo was a man; his humanity was pure and uncontaminated, he was outside this world of negation. Thanks to Lorenzo, I managed not to forget that I myself was a man" (Survival 122).

What also defines Levi as a complete man is his awareness of his weakening physique. Unlike Schepschel, Elias, Henri or Alfred L., Levi is still conscious of his physical appearance, as illustrated when the three chemists "are faced with the girls of the laboratory" and "feel ourselves sink into the ground from shame and embarrassment (Survival 142). Levi and his colleagues "know what [they] look like" and "are accustomed to [their] smell" but "the girls are not, and never miss a chance of showing it" (Survival 142). The three chemists are seen as "squalid and filthy, awkward and insecure in our shoes" (Survival 143). Levi's comment, "to us, the girls seem outside this world," is an obvious statement when one considers how physically dehumanized the Germans have made them in the camp (Survival 143).

Just after his encounters with the German girls, Levi contrasts his current physical state with an introspection: "This time last year I was a free man: an outlaw but free, I had a name and a family, I had an eager and restless mind, an agile and healthy body. I used to think of many, far away things: of my work, of the end of the war" (Survival 143). In addition, he remembers thinking about things that set apart humans from other animals: "of good and evil, of nature of things and of the laws which govern human actions; and also of the mountains, of singing and loving, of music, of poetry" (Survival 143). Yet, what he forgets is that just a while before, he passed a chemistry examination by talking about his work, and with Jean, he recited Dante's poem, reviving his memory of the Italian mountains. Levi has also pondered the complexities of the human soul as he encounters different types of personalities in the camp, such as those of Elias, Henri, Alex, and Pannwitz.

Levi wants to explain to Frau Meyer that he was once a "free" man, but, of course, because he fears he is viewed as a subhuman, and that words from his mouth would not reach her ears. "She would be unable to bear my proximity," Levi laments, "and would flee from me, as one flees from contact with an incurable invalid, or from a man condemned to death" (Survival 144). But Levi does not really know how Frau Meyer would react to his testimony, because he adds, "perhaps she would give me a coupon for a pint of civilian soup" (Survival 144). Nevertheless, Levi does not have any success in showing the Germans in the laboratory that he is a "man" with a history and intelligence.

Levi also sees himself as less of "man" in the chapter "The Last One," when a man gets hung for attempting to start a rebellion. After the man is executed, Alberto and

Levi avoid looking at each other, just as Walter and Levi did when Schmulek was taken to the crematoria. This time however, Levi is reduced to shame because he feels he does not possess the same magnitude of bravery and mental strength needed to rebel against the oppressors. It is the strength of the man that made him look like a man to Alberto and Levi. However, not to rebel in Auschwitz does not necessarily make a person less of a human being. In the book I sommersi e i salvati (The Drowned and the Saved), Levi confirms that rebellions in camps did take place, as in Treblinka and Bikenau, but he explains why rebelling did not happen on a wider scale, as one living in the post-war, outside world might expect. The civilians at the time of his imprisonment "see us reduced to ignoble slavery, without hair, without honour and without names, beaten every day, more abject every day, and they never see in our eyes a light of rebellion, or of peace, or of faith" (Survival 121). Levi's logical justification for not rebelling is asking the reader to think, "What sense, what use would it have been to open the gates for thousands of individuals barely able to drag themselves around, and for others who would not have known where, in an enemy country, to look for refuge?" (Drowned 159).

Bettelheim's study on mass behavior focused on how the Gestapo punished an entire group of prisoners to enforce its "anti-individualistic philosophy" upon them. As a result of enforcing the "anti-individualistic philosophy," the group of prisoners, as a whole, controlled the individual (136). Yet, even under the strictest oppressor, "each prisoner was unusually dependent for survival on group cooperation," and the same tendency is also apparent once the prisoners are liberated (136). Early in the Se questo è un uomo, Levi makes it clear that most prisoners do not believe in the Hobbesian idea

that "man is fundamentally brutal, egoistic and stupid in his conduct once every civilized institution is taken away, and that the Häftling is consequently nothing but a man without inhibitions" (Survival 87). Instead, they believe "that the only conclusion to be drawn is that many social habits and instincts are reduced to silence" (Survival 87). This is especially true in the last chapter, when the Germans abandon the camp. In the chapter "The Story of Ten Days," Levi and the other prisoners work together as a group to survive, by moving a cast-iron stove and sacks of potatoes to the hut. Levi explains that "when the broken window was repaired and the stove began to spread its heat, something seemed to relax in everyone, and at that moment, Towarowski proposed to the others that each of them offer a slice of bread to us three who have been working. And so it was agreed" (Survival 159-60). To offer food to others is the gesture, according to Lang, that "marks the end of the Lager mentality, which dictated values based upon the motto 'eat your bread, and if you can, that of your neighbour'" (6). Levi reflects that "Only a day before, a similar event would have been inconceivable" (Survival 160).

Even though Levi is very well aware that he could die of illness, he considers moving into a different hut "with less danger of infection" (Survival 160). But despite the risk of getting sicker, Levi decides to stay because the stove "spreads a wonderful warmth; I had my bed here, and by now, a tie united us, the eleven patients of the *Infektionsabteilung*" (Survival 160). With the Auschwitz camp laws abolished, Levi realizes that "we who had not died slowly changed from Häftlinge to men again" (Survival 160). At this point, Levi feels a rejuvenated connection on a humanitarian level, because even though the remaining prisoners "were broken by tiredness," they have

"accomplished something useful" together, "perhaps like God after the first day of creation" (Survival 161). No Tower of bricks or loads of heavy soup could match up to this sense of unity and triumph. Levi and the other prisoners, who survived Nazi rule by using tactics that were self-beneficial, end by working to survive the aftermath of Auschwitz, like a team of men.

Even though Levi has good fortune in meeting prisoners like Alberto and Lorenzo, receiving a position in the laboratory, and learning a new language quickly, he barely survives in the end, battling scarlet fever and malnutrition. However, despite the extreme conditions of Auschwitz, Levi is able to defy the Nazis' attempt to apply the "Final Solution" on all victims. Amid the everlasting threat to destroy the inmates, he is able to retain the memory of his life in Italy and share his cultural knowledge with others. Having survived the Holocaust, Levi emphasizes the importance of telling the story to "the rest," which includes us today (Survival 9). Levi's memoir is the voice that not only speaks for himself, but for the countless other prisoners who have perished, and, cannot speak for themselves.

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